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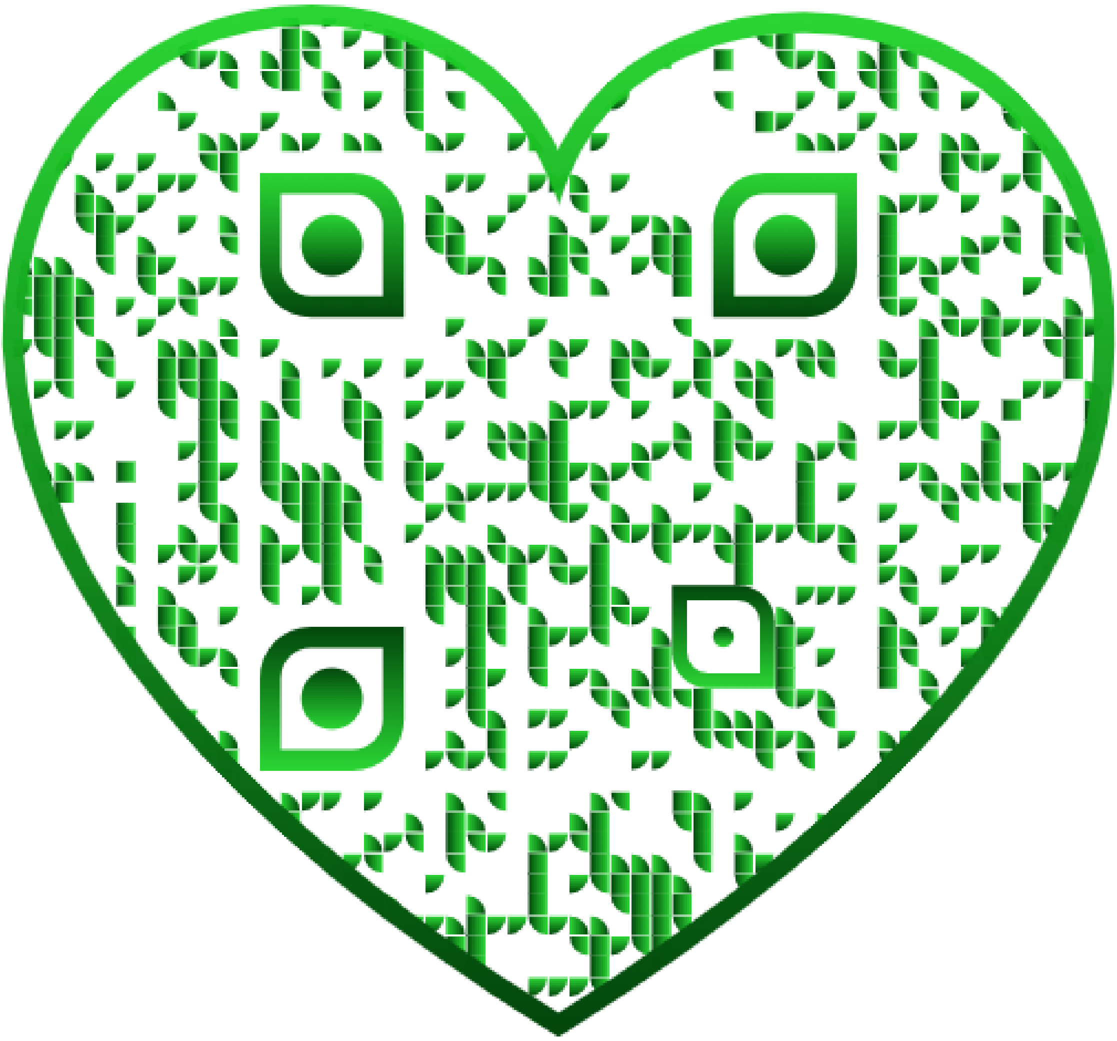

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Amateur GARDENING 140 years of practical advice
1884 The world's oldest gardening magazine 2025

A warm welcome

Gardening together

The ability to nurture and grow with our gardens, with plants, with green spaces and the wildlife living within, never gets boring. Especially not if we make time to put down any exacting must-do lists and look, listen and learn from the natural world around us.

As well as providing us with lots of beautiful blooms, luscious leaves and edibles to bring to the table, gardens and gardening offer us space to be. They afford an opportunity to switch off from the world around and be at peace in the here and now, in what we see around us. As proud custodians of our own little spaces we have the ability to create radiance and resilience within them and ourselves.

Reaching out to others can also take gardening onto new levels of enjoyment, from sharing ideas and leftover plants, to discussing (no doubt animatedly) the best way to deal with the weather or slugs in 2025. Local gardening groups offer a further fantastic source of social interaction, seed swaps and solutions to help you garden in your community, and there are many fantastic online networks besides.

Whatever way you choose to reach out, gardening with others, even on a small scale, connects us in lots of meaningful and enjoyable ways and can enable some prime money-saving to boot. It taps into some of the simple pleasures of exchange and barter and provides the opportunity to learn some good old-fashioned make, mend and do skills which are hard to beat.

I know I'm biased, given what I do for a living, but I honestly believe that gardening also has the potential to be a great leveller in communities at large. No matter how we fill our days, the ability to nurture a seed into a plant can build bridges through the creation of harvests, and humble happiness abounds.

So maybe this year, a positive action might be the growing of a few extra plants for others in your community; friends, neighbours or complete strangers. Or the taking of some cuttings to pass on - and maybe together these little green-fingered acts of kindness, care and community action will prosper and grow. There is hope in little acts of giving nonetheless, seed by seed, plant by plant, it all adds up and healthy gardens will prosper and grow.

This issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, Sue Bradley, Beth Chatto Gardens, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Andrew Oldham, Adam Kirtland, Liz Zorab, Chris Collins, Ellen Mary, Rosie Irving and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of AG continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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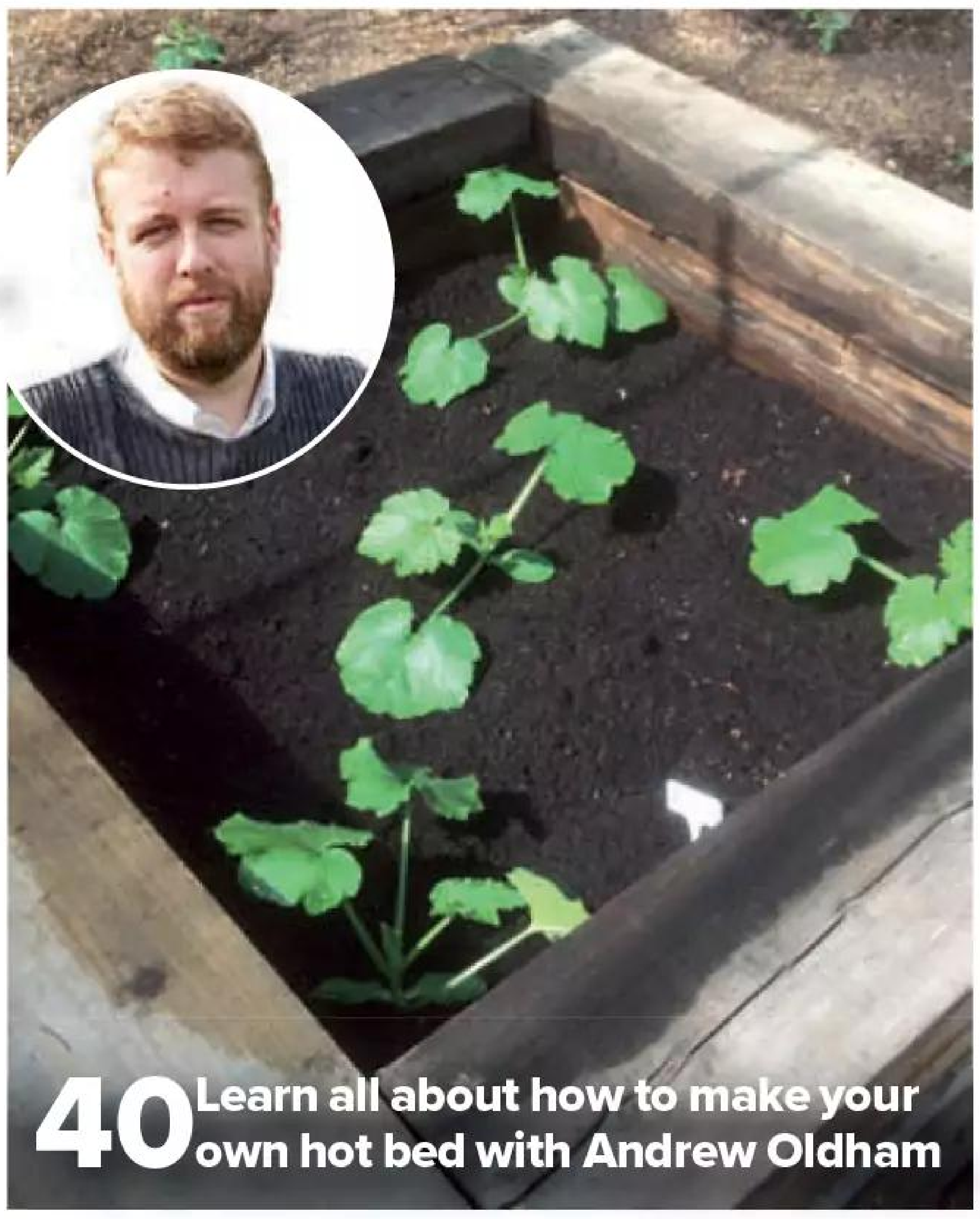

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22 February 2025

Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

Can your community garden help the RHS help others?

© RHS Paul Debois

Community gardening is increasingly important and the RHS wants to know more about it

Survey launched to map the impact of citizen gardens

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has launched a nationwide survey to map the extent of community gardening across the UK and provide a clear picture of who participates and why, its reach, impact and barriers to growth.

RHS Director General Clare Matterson said: "Understanding where community gardening is happening and the form it takes – organised or other – will help in mapping this vital, public service and open up new potential avenues of support for building greener and more sustainable communities."

Each year the RHS works with approximately 5,000 community groups but there are estimated to be thousands more doing invaluable work.

Indications suggest that recent years have seen an increase in the number of community gardening groups, particularly in urban areas, reflecting the increasing recognition of gardening as a tool for addressing socio-economic, health and environmental challenges.

And these groups focus on more than just gardening. For example, every spring Bath in Bloom runs a toad migration protection scheme to make sure local amphibians reach their breeding grounds in safety.

Sarah Galvin, RHS Head of National Community Programmes, said: "Community gardening is at the heart of creating greener, healthier, and more connected communities but the shape and structure of it is changing. This survey is an opportunity to understand the incredible breadth and diversity of community gardening across the nation."

Groups and individuals involved in gardening outside of private and commercial gardens can contribute to this report via www.rhs.org.uk/communitygardeningsurvey

The results will be announced in October.

Drumlanrig Castle Gardens is hosting snowdrop walks this month

Snowdrop walks in Scotland

Drumlanrig Castle Gardens in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland is hosting its annual Snowdrop Walks on Saturday and Sunday, February 8-9 and over the weekend of February 22-23.

The walks will take place from 11am-3pm each day along a specially designed way-marked route showcasing an array of delicate snowdrops and vibrant witch hazels, bringing warmth and colour to the winter garden.

Refreshments will be available and there will also be a plant sale.

The best plants for productivity

If you're still suffering from winter sluggishness, maybe a new house plant could boost your productivity and lift your mood.

Research by experts at the University of Exeter and Beards and Daisies has revealed the best plants to boost your mood and give you more oomph.

They include the Chinese money plant, Swiss cheese plant (monstera), snake plant (sansevieria), Boston fern and prayer plant.

All these plants help to purify the air and make your working space, whether you're at home or in an office, a better place to be.

© Shutterstock

Right: Prayer plants can boost your mood and productivity.

The 'world's ugliest lawn' is revealed!

If you're depressed about the state of your garden lawn, try and be more like Leisa Elliott, the proud winner of the 2024 World's Ugliest Lawn Competition.

Now in its second year, the contest rewards lawn owners for not watering their parched yellow grass and patchy flowerbeds and praises their water conservation work.

Leisa lives in a coastal community near Christchurch, New Zealand, and her plot is battered by salty winds and receives little rainfall.

She said: "Our drinking water is pumped from a well in nearby Kaitorete Spit. In my mind, drinking water is drinking water, not watering-the-lawn water.

"I have aimed at creating a garden that primarily looks after itself, making its own natural rhythm."

Her garden includes lots of drought-resilient plants, and Leisa added that when the rains do arrive, her plot is 'an oasis after a desert, a sight to behold'.

The World's Ugliest Lawn contest began in Gotland, Sweden, as a stunt to promote water conservation following an irrigation ban in 2022 due to water shortages, and it quickly became a global phenomenon.

Above: Your dry lawns could be helping to save the planet!

Staff preparing the Princess of Wales Conservatory for Kew's orchid festival

© RBG Kew

Get a taste of Peru at the gardens at Kew

Get your dancing trousers on because from this weekend until February 22, Kew Gardens is hosting an extravaganza of Peruvian music and culture as part of the 2025 Peruvian Orchid Festival.

Running until Sunday, March 2, the garden's 20th celebration of orchids will focus on the plants and culture of the South American country in the splendid setting of the Princess of Wales Conservatory, which has been decked out to recreate the natural beauty of Peru.

As well as orchids, plants will include the world's largest bromeliad, the endangered *Puya raimondii* (commonly known as the Queen of the Andes) and there will also be an orchid aviary with Peruvian birds, and an orchid-bedecked alpaca.

Other topics featured will be 'coca vs cocaine', which examines the need to protect native sources of coca plants and improve detection of illegal cocaine factories, and an insight into growing chuño, the bitter potato grown for generations by farmers in the Andes.

There will also be opportunities to sample the scents made by orchids when they are ready for pollination by male orchid bees, and the chance to explore the unique relationship between the people of Peru and the country's unique, endangered and little-explored Lomas microclimates that are under threat from climate change.

As well as plantlife, there will be cocktails, food, music and dancing on Friday and Saturday nights and an exhibition of natural images by the world famous Peruvian photographer Mariano Vivanco.

Kew spokeswoman Solene Dequiret said: "We are thrilled to bring the biodiversity of Peru to life in this year's orchid festival.

"Orchids Peru is a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in the wonders of nature and escape the winter blues while learning about Kew's ongoing commitment to understand and protect our planet's biodiversity."

A rose collection for every garden

If you are looking to expand your rose garden or considering starting to grow roses, David Austin Roses has four new plant collections to send you on your way.

Each collection contains three different roses and retails at £60. They cover all aspects of gardening and include:

- The Beginners Collection for gardeners dipping a toe into the wonderful world of roses;
- The Smaller Spaces Collection for patios, balconies and urban gardens;
- The Fragrant Garden Collection, each rose carefully chosen for its beauty and scent;
- The Perfect for Pollinators Collection for anyone wanting to help wildlife in their garden.

Chris Lowe, Nursery Manager at David Austin, said: "We've created these collections to make growing roses more accessible and enjoyable.

"They're designed to inspire confidence, whether you're just starting out or looking to add something special to your garden."

For further details and to buy plants, visit www.davidaustinroses.co.uk or call 01902 376300.

Above: The Perfect for Pollinators collection from David Austin Roses

Church Farm in Notts is just one of the many NHS gardens open on February 16

© Peter Clegg

Grow your love with the National Garden Scheme

Celebrate your love and your love of gardening this Valentine's Day with a visit to one of the many romantic National Garden Scheme plots open this month.

A wide range of properties all across the UK are opening their garden gates on February 14, 15 and 16, from stately homes to secret urban delights.

NGS chief George Plumptre said: "Visits to our snowdrop and spring flower gardens are always a popular start to the garden visiting season.

Our latest research highlights the benefits of visiting in winter and shows how a winter visit helps combat the particular seasonal challenges that we all face at that time of year."

Most of the gardens have homemade refreshments and plant sales too.

For full details visit www.findagarden.ngs.org.uk

Much more than sculpture

Leading sculpture park and botanic garden, Sculpture by the Lakes, has announced its most dynamic events programme to date for 2025.

The Dorset destination will host a series of wellbeing retreats and pop-up markets this year, and has confirmed the return of its popular 'Paws Around The Park' dog festival.

There will also be gardening workshops led by John Cunningham, who trained at The Royal Botanical Gardens, and Philip Gamble who has more than 40 years' experience in horticulture.

Sculpture by the Lakes is an idyllic retreat nestled within 26 acres near Dorchester in Dorset. It is the only sculpture park in the world to be recognised as an accredited botanic garden.

For full details visit *www.sculpturebythelakes.co.uk/events*

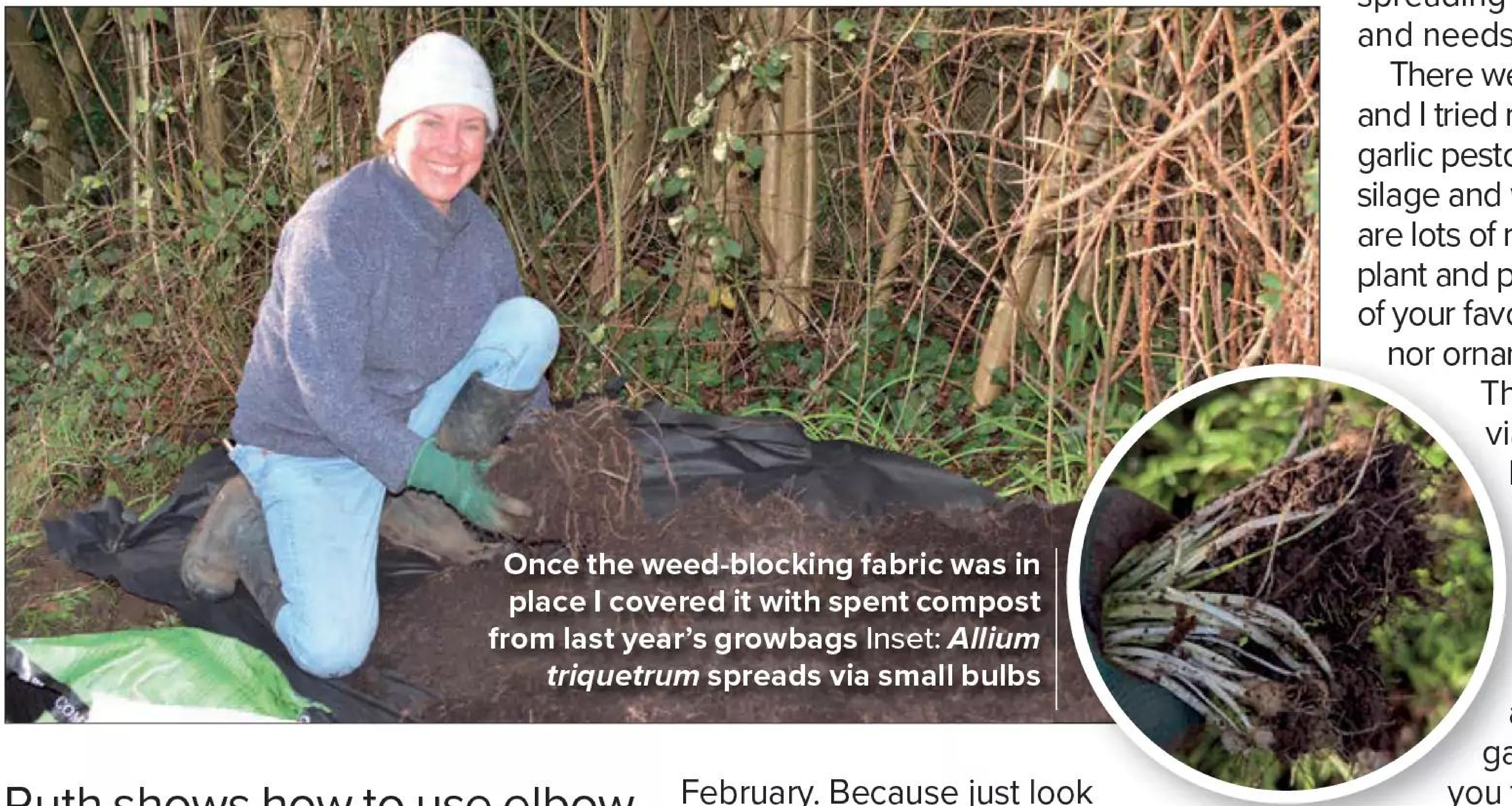
Right: Sculpture by the Lakes is offering a range of courses and workshops

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert **Ruth Hayes**

Welcome to the first big battle of 2025!



Once the weed-blocking fabric was in place I covered it with spent compost from last year's growbags Inset: ***Allium triquetrum*** **spreads via small bulbs**

Ruth shows how to use elbow grease and organic methods to tackle weeds

When I was 10, my dad took me to see the hottest new film on the block - *Star Wars*. Even though I was still too young to fully appreciate the charms of a young Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford, it still blew me away and over the years I have remained a fan of (most of) the series.

Now, of course, that famous first film (still the best of the bunch in my book) has been renamed as *Star Wars - A New Hope* and I always think that the second part of the name chimes well with this month of February. Because just look around you! Everything is starting to bustle and get busy; the birds are pairing off and claiming their territories, spring bulbs are making their colourful presence felt and trees and shrubs have a bright green fuzz from the first unfurling of their fresh new leaves.

There is a feeling of optimism and hope in the air but as with the *Star Wars* saga, in the garden there is always another battle to fight and a foe to vanquish, and this week it's been the turn of *Allium triquetrum*, or three-cornered leek.

Also known as stinking garlic, this potentially dominant, spreading plant was introduced to the UK in the 1800s and it soon took hold, at times crowding out native plants to the extent that it is now an offence to plant or dump it in the wild.

It its place, contained, it does have edible uses, but for me it has colonised an area of our front garden and is now spreading through the back garden hedge and needs to be stopped.

There were a few plants there last year and I tried my hand at using them to make garlic pesto, but the end result tasted like silage and was swiftly binned. I know there are lots of recommended recipes for this plant and please do write in and share some of your favourites, but for me it is 'neither use nor ornament', as my mum used to say.

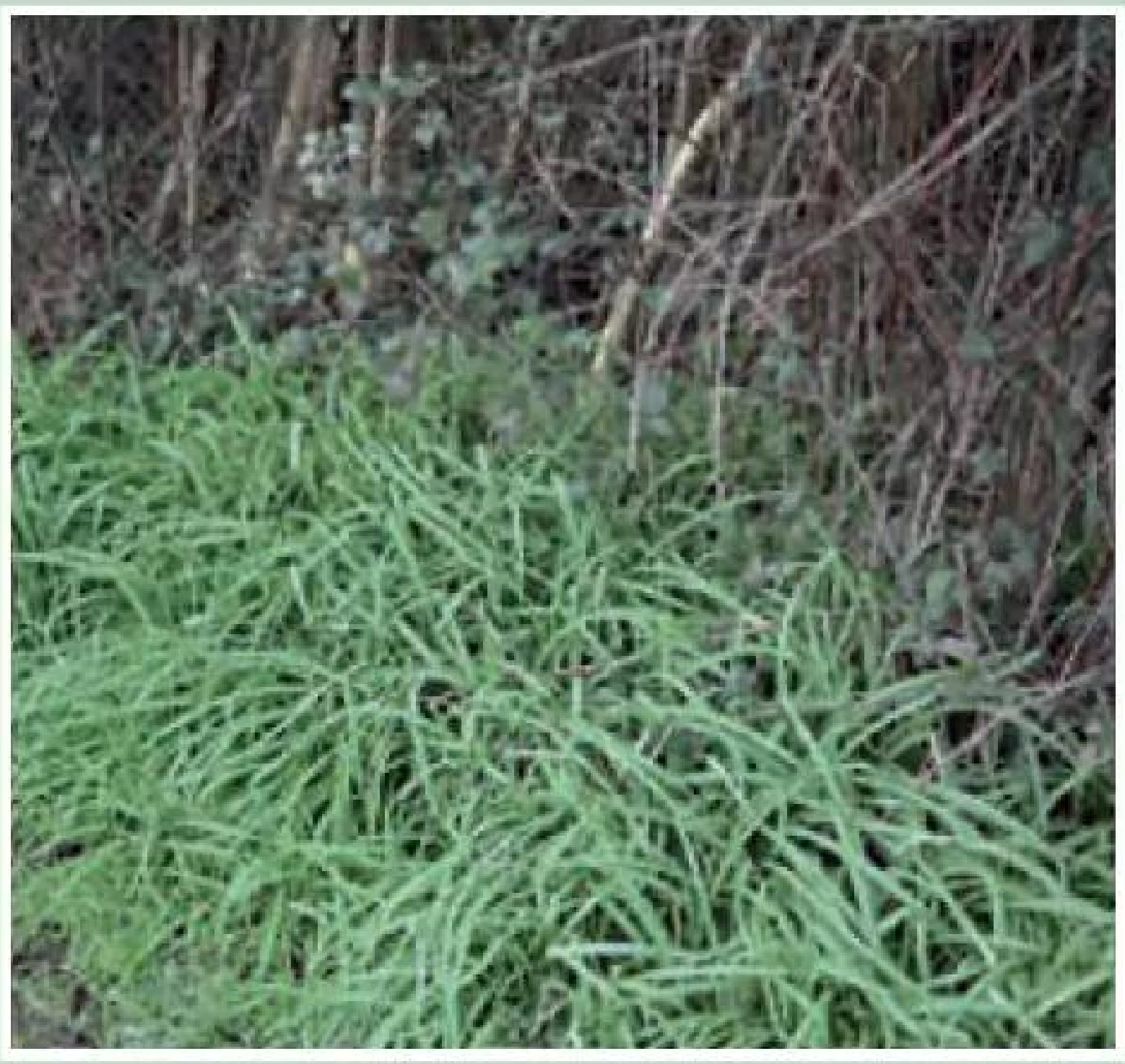
The trouble is, it spreads rapidly via little bulbs that are easy to break from the top growth and hard to dig up.

I spent a good hour getting up what I could, shadowed by a hungry robin who provided a glorious soundtrack to my work, at the end of which the entire garden reeked of rotten garlic. Can you tell I'm not a fan? I then covered the ground from where I'd dug the bulbs with weed suppressing material that I anchored down and then mounded high with the spent compost from old growbags.

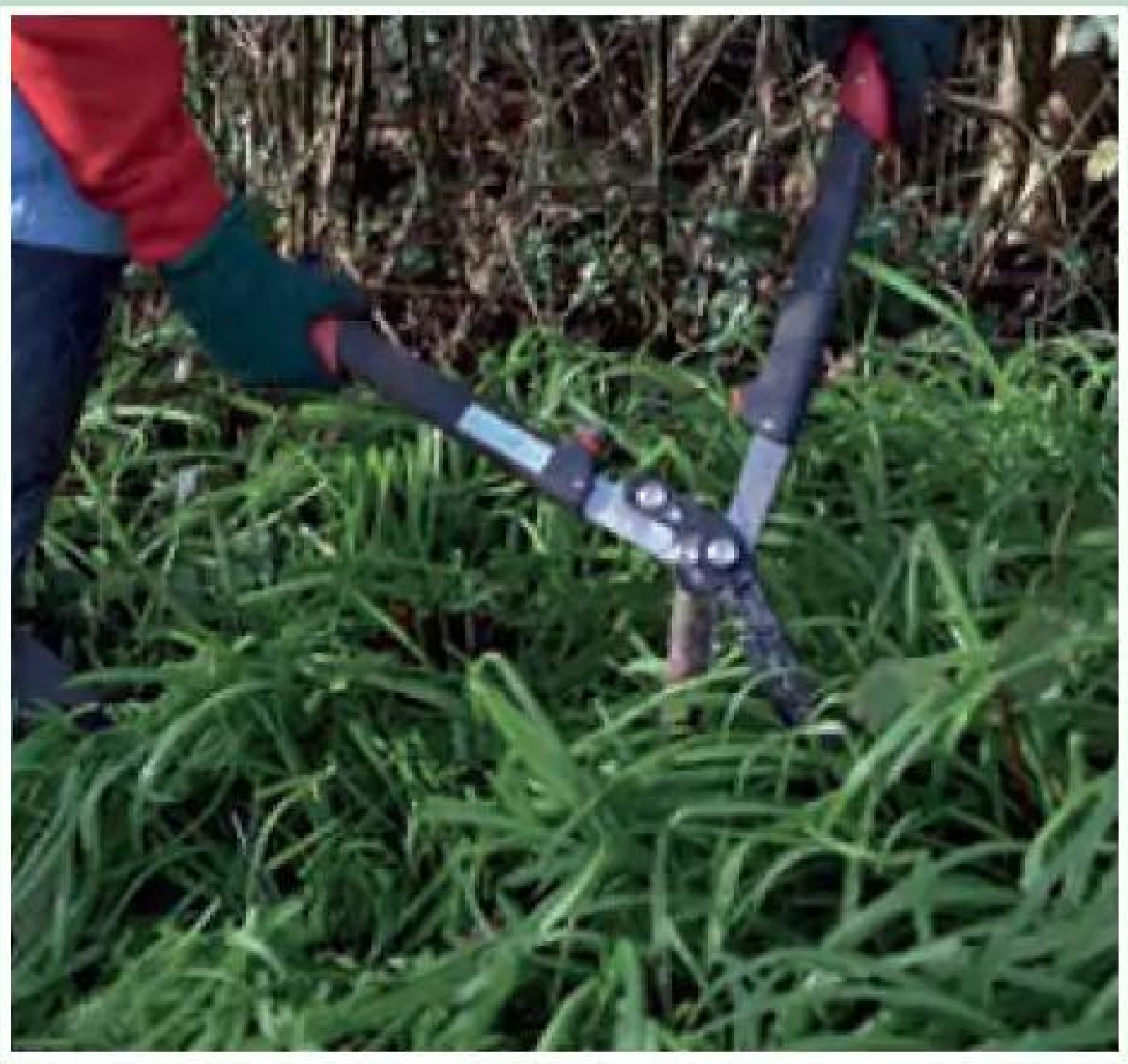
Unfortunately I was unable to unearth every last scrap of *Allium triquetrum* despite my best efforts because it has spread to inaccessible areas of the hedge. The unearthed bulbs are bound for the local green waste recycling centre because to add them to an unheated compost would simply run the risk of spreading them further around the garden.

But as an opening skirmish in the 'Battle of Stinking Garlic Ridge', it was a success and I shall keep fighting until all the plants are gone!

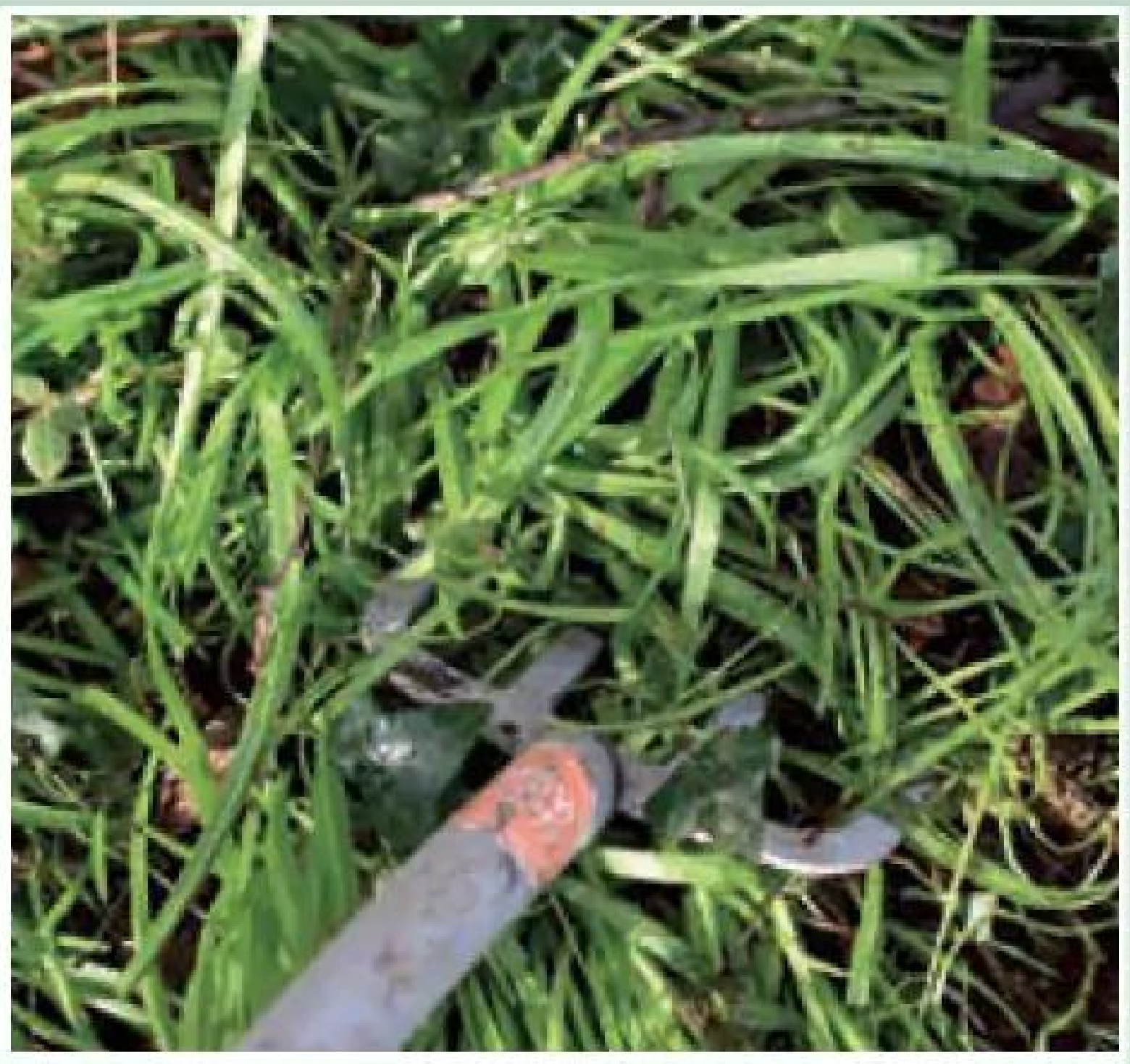
Using fabric and mulch to block invasive weeds



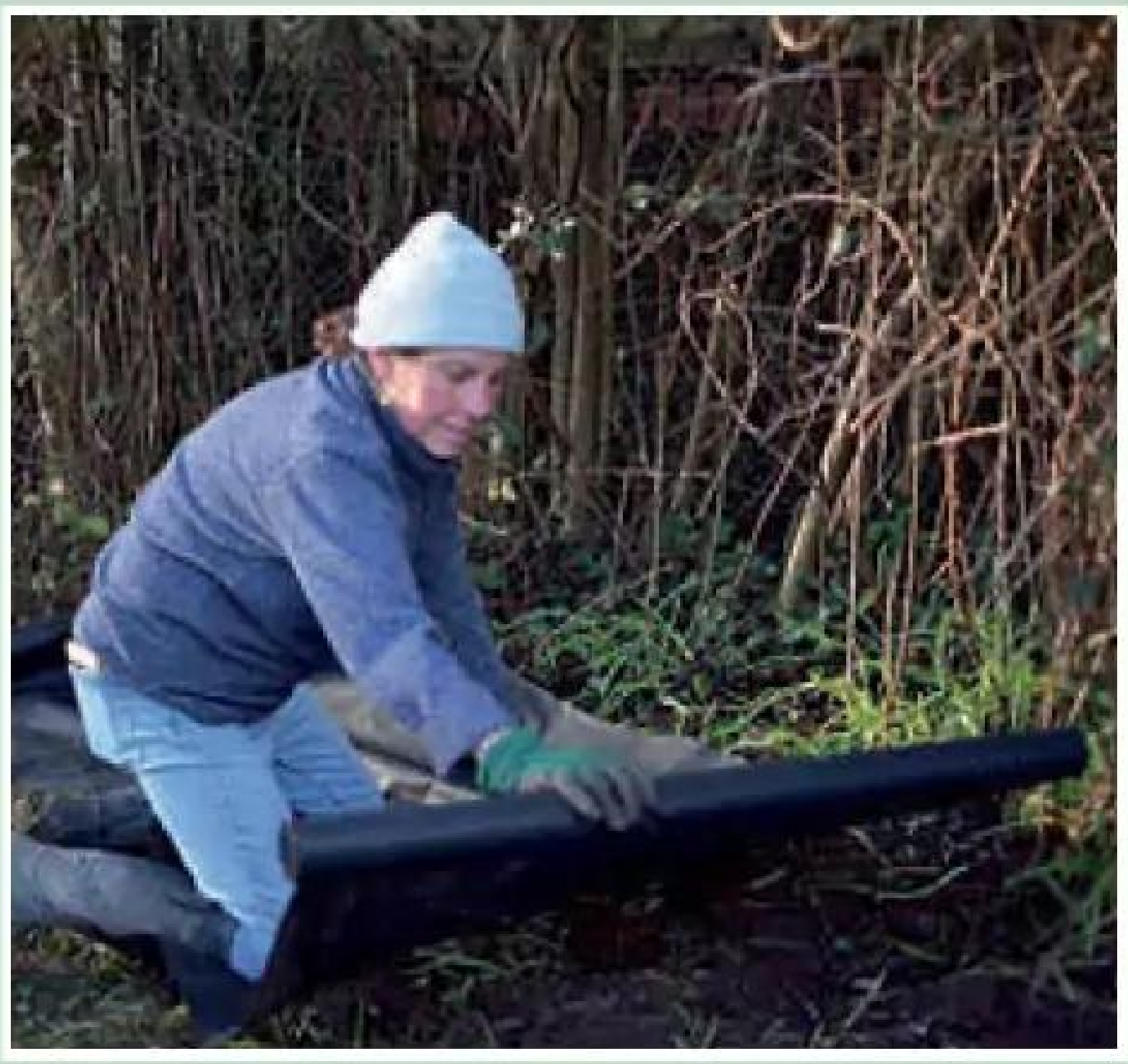
1 Three-cornered leek can be an invasive nuisance and has been spreading like wildfire underneath our garden hedge.



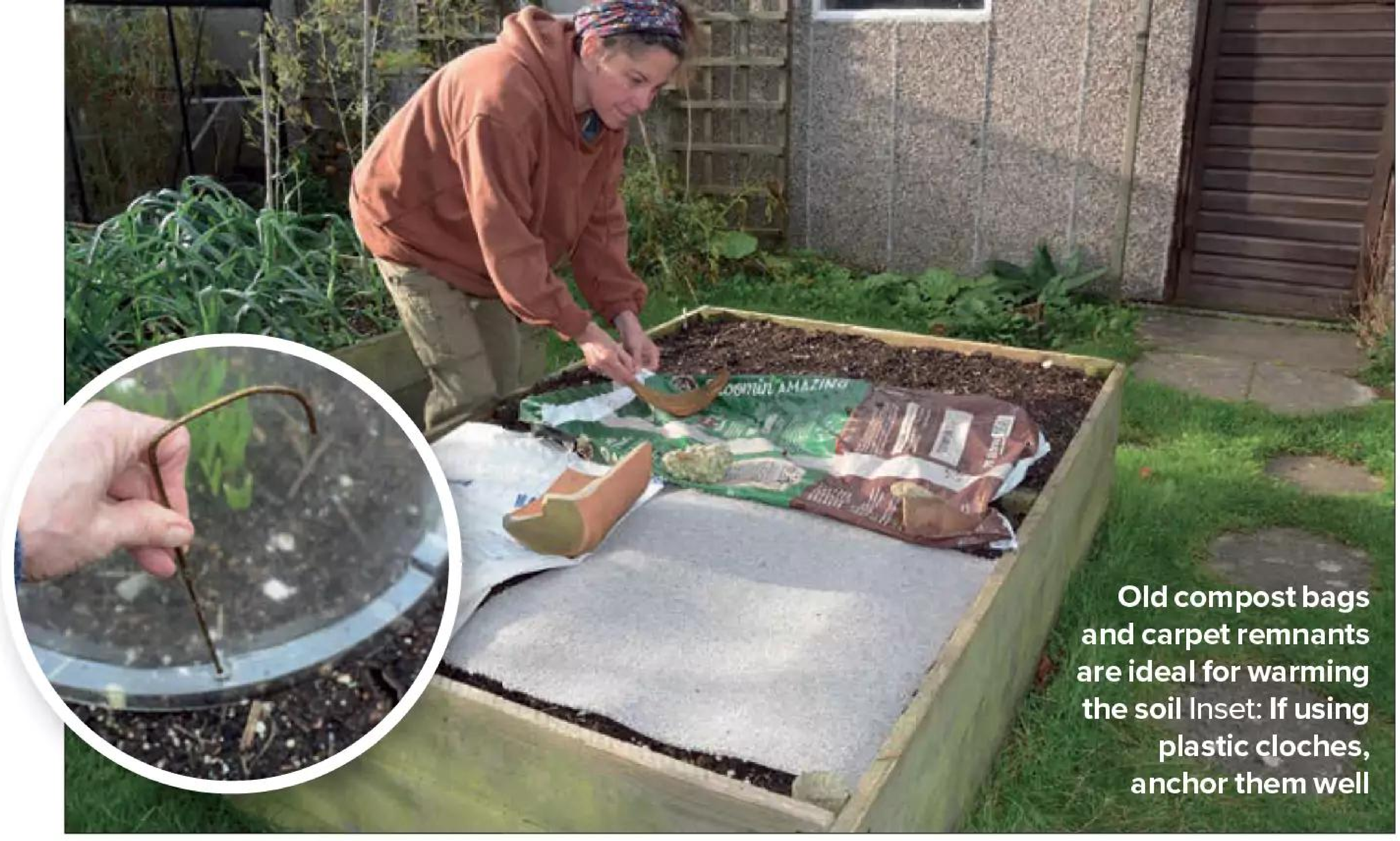
2 I started removing it by chopping back the top growth to make clumps of plants easier to see and dig up.



3 I carefully prised plants from the soil, taking care not to lose the bulbs, which will go to the local dump.



4 I used weed-blocking membrane as a base for mulching, but cardboard would work equally well.



Old compost bags and carpet remnants are ideal for warming the soil Inset: **If using plastic cloches, anchor them well**

Warming soil ahead of sowing and planting

This late winter task is easy - but takes time

We've had a right old mix of wet and cold weather this winter and my crystal ball is resolutely refusing to show me what elements might arrive in the next few weeks.

So I'm holding off sowing and planting outside for a few weeks, while sowing a few early varieties undercover, and concentrating on getting the soil ready for the growing season.

Weeding is a joy at this time of year because they are easier to remove when the soil is damp and yielding, so I've had a couple of extremely satisfying afternoons scouring dandelions and petty spurge from our borders.

Once weeded, I covered the ground with a dense layer of homemade compost (a great winter workout for me) which then started warming the soil.

The persistent wet and cold of early spring encourages soil to hold onto its chill factor, which means seeds take longer to germinate and may start to rot before they get going, and young plants are reluctant to spread their roots and start growing.

Warming the soil is easy to do and you can do it very cheaply too, by spreading flattened cardboard boxes, horticultural fleece, old carpet remnants and even empty compost bags on the soil.

Anchor them down with stones or tent pegs and they will help the soil to warm up, even if only by a few degrees, making it a more welcoming host for seeds and plants.

As an added bonus, plastic, card and carpet also help suppress weeds, so anything you grow will have a head start.

Put soil to the test

Know its pH and nutrient levels

1 Test the soil pH in different areas of the garden. If any plants are failing to thrive, do a soil nutrient test too - they are widely available, easy to use and a great way of keeping soil health at its best.

2 If ponds and birdbaths freeze, carefully hold a pan of warm water on the ice to melt it. Never try to crack it with a stone or use boiling water as the shock/ heat can kill pond creatures and damage birdbaths.

Pruning winter jasmine for fabulous flowers next year

One of the joys of winter is seeing dull days lit by the sunny, yellow, star-shaped flowers of winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*).

A low-maintenance, reliable shrub, it has no scent, unlike other members of its family, but we can forgive it for that when it brings so much early joy with its cheerful flowers.

Winter jasmine is usually grown as a climber, trained up walls or used to hide unsightly fences.

It likes a sunny spot with fertile soil that drains well, and it often propagates itself when untrained stems droop down and root in the soil below.

It is relatively trouble-free, not particularly bothered by pests or disease, but it may grow a little threadbare and develop bald patches if not pruned regularly.

I keep ours healthy by giving it a trim in late winter or early spring. Don't prune it in autumn because its flowers are produced on last year's growth and if cut back too late you'll remove the productive wood.

As winter jasmine has a tendency to sprawl, cut it back to a neat shape, trimming each stem and stopping at a healthy pair of buds.

Tie in any stragglers, and then feed and mulch afterwards.

Above: **Cut back winter jasmine to keep it tidy and flourishing** Inset: **Feed and mulch after pruning**

I always cut back our rose bushes in late winter or early spring
Inset: Remove old leaves affected by black spot

How to get your best ever roses this year

Plant and prune roses ahead of the growing season

Pruning your roses in late winter or early spring is one of the best ways of ensuring they perform their best this summer.

It keeps them healthy and in a good shape, improving airflow through their stems and helping reduce the risk of fungal diseases.

This is also your chance to remove any dead wood and last year's new stems showing the scabby black lesions that signify black spot disease.

Don't forget to scan the soil around your roses to remove the remains of all fallen leaves infected with black spot.

February is also your last call for ordering bare root roses while they remain dormant, though avoid putting them in soil where roses have been grown previously as they may fall foul of replant disease.

This is a little-understood condition where plants fail to thrive in soil where members of their family have grown before, though the risk can be lessened by adding fresh soil from elsewhere in the garden to the planting hole, or planting in a cardboard box with its base removed, so that the roots can get established as the cardboard decomposes in the soil.

Adding mycorrhizal fungi when planting is also thought to help by strengthening the roots and improving the uptake of water and nutrients.

Young roses with bare roots swaddled in plastic or hessian are an economical way of adding roses to borders and containers.

You need to soak their roots in water for a good 30 minutes before planting and use the soil 'tide mark' up their stems to gauge how deep they need to go in the soil.

Water well after planting and mulch with well-rotted compost or manure.

Cutting back buddleia

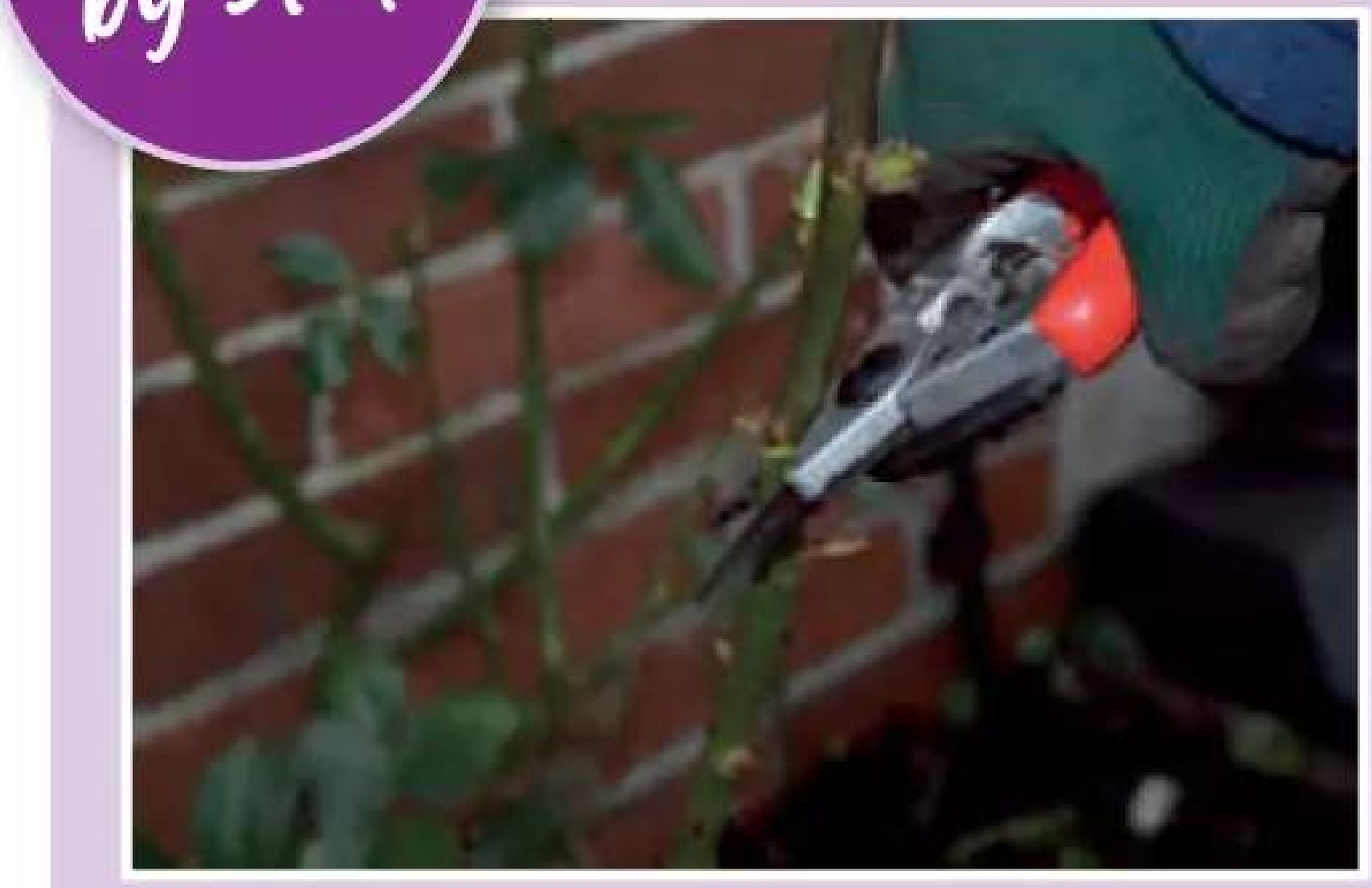
Keep your butterfly bush in good shape

Hard pruning buddleia keeps plants shapely and flowering well

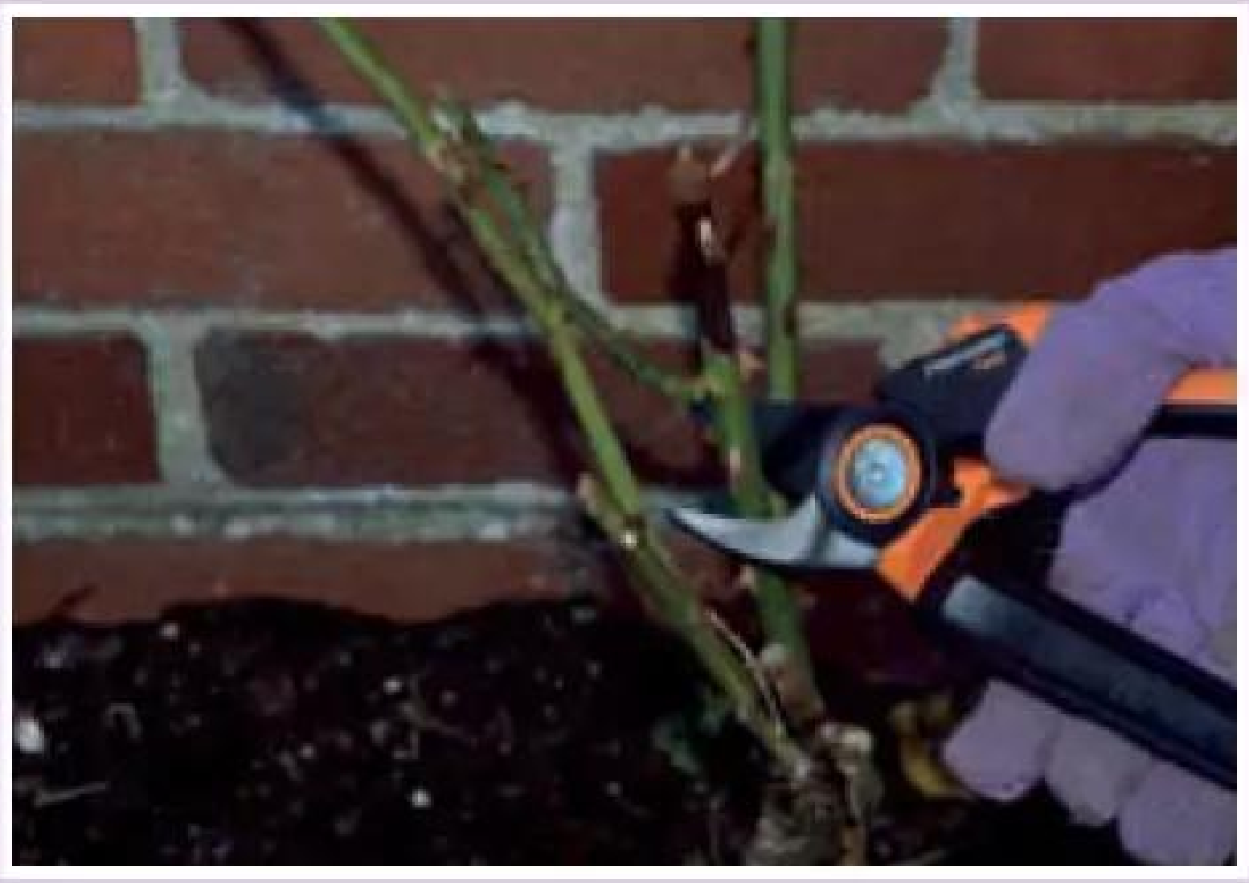
- We used to have a buddleia in the front garden and every year its hanging racemes of lilac blooms acted as a magnet for the neighbourhood butterflies.
- For a few weeks each summer, the shrub was alive with painted ladies, tortoiseshells, peacocks and red admirals and it was an absolute joy to witness.
- Buddleias, also appropriately known as 'butterfly bushes', are popular shrubs and there are many varieties, from large ones to dwarf cultivars perfect for small gardens and containers.
- Larger varieties can become unwieldy and top heavy if left unpruned, so to keep them neat and prevent them being blown over in rough weather, they need cutting back.
- Late winter/early spring is the ideal time, when new growth is starting to appear.
- Simply cut branches to half their length so you can see what you're doing, then further reduce them to just above a leaf bud.
- Very overgrown plants can be cut back to within a few inches of the soil. This looks brutal, but your buddleia will soon regenerate and throw out lots of strong, healthy growth. Mulch well after pruning.

Step by step

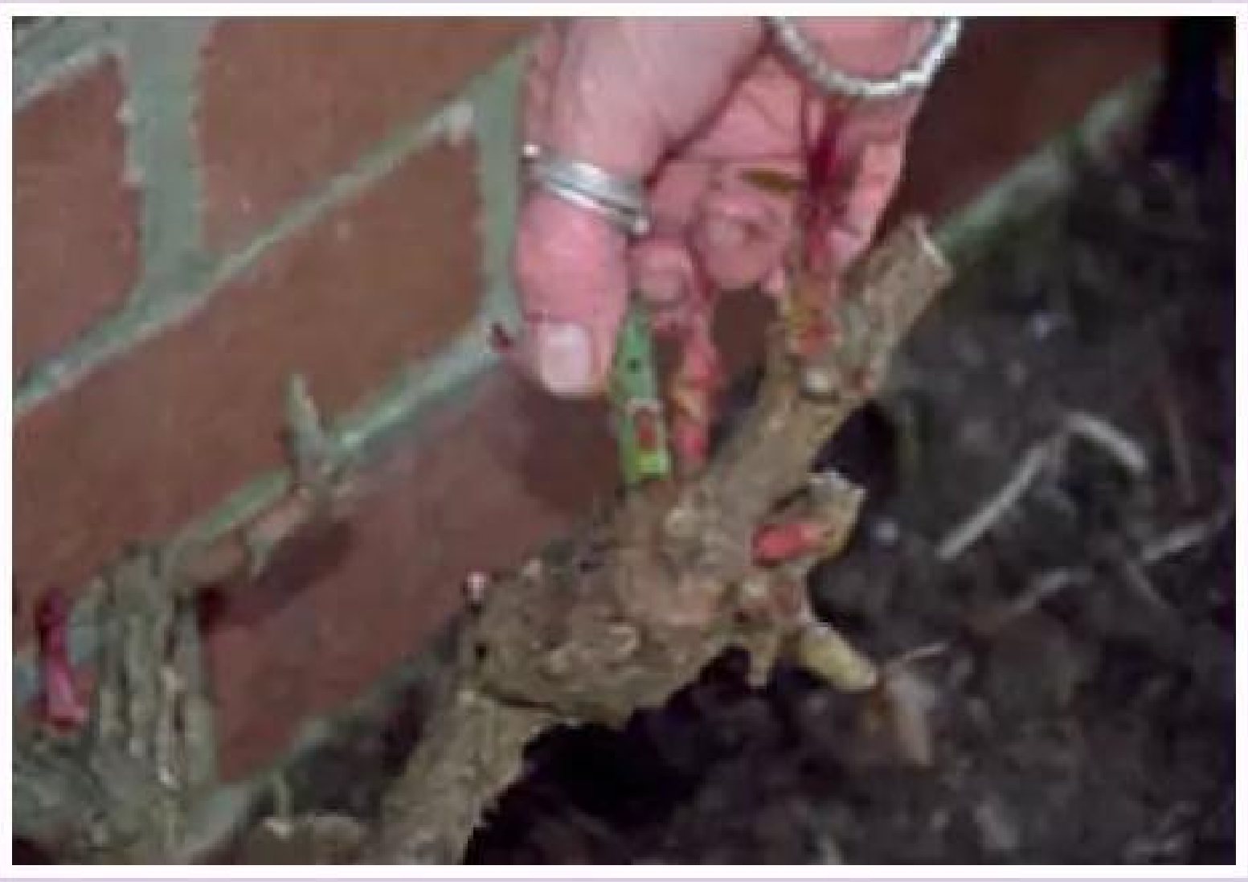
For rose jobs for late winter and early spring



1 Cut back stems to just above an outward-facing bud. Make a slanted cut so moisture runs off instead of sitting and softening the wood.

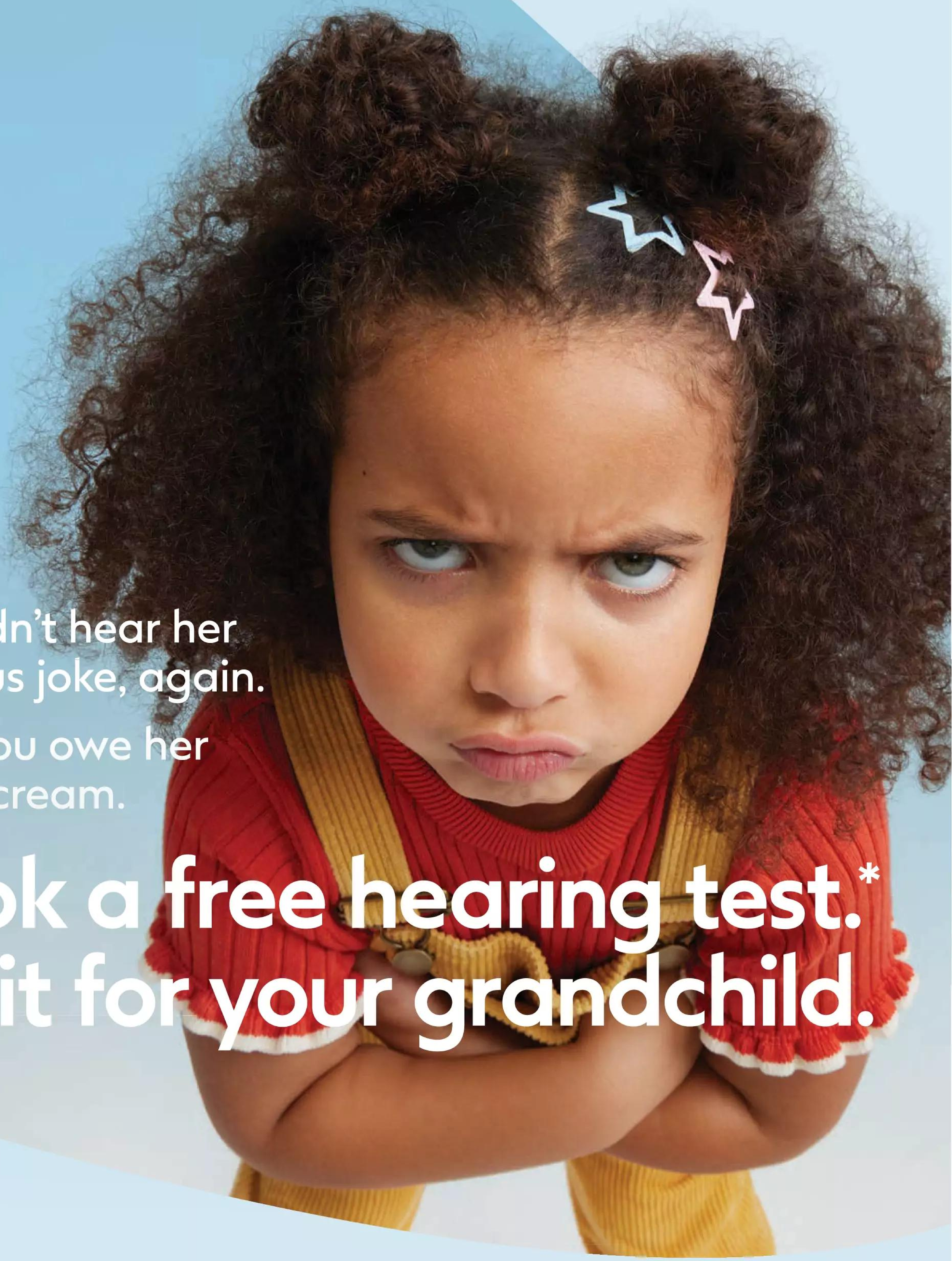


2 Remove all spindly, inward-growing stems and dead and diseased growth, cutting back to healthy new wood.



3 Look for new shoots and rub off any pointing inwards. If left, they will clutter the insides of the rose and restrict airflow.

4 After pruning, feed your rose bushes and then mulch them to feed the soil and bury any remaining black spot spores.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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Early perennial crops, vegetable mallow, and tips for broad beans and garlic

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

Brace yourself Instagrammers, the forced rhubarb reveals will soon be upon us! And who can fail to be impressed by videos unveiling hot pink stems topped with sulphur-yellow leaves? It all does look very pretty. But, most importantly, forced plants taste utterly scrumptious, so how do you go about it if you've not tried forcing before, and is rhubarb the only crop you can force? Luckily, no.

Perennial edibles are undergoing a revival, and many can easily be forced. Every year I force seakale now, and can testify that it is truly delicious. Globe artichokes, asparagus, sorrel, chicory, lovage and dandelions (yes, dandelions!) all produce incredibly tasty forced shoots. The flavours are milder and sweeter than the unforced edible, and the texture is non-fibrous and tender. So, how is forcing achieved?

Essentially, these perennial plants are deprived of light, and the new shoots surge upwards, looking for it. So, clumps covered now will yield forced shoots for you during March and April. Clumps must be healthy and mature (young and weak plants will become stunted, as forcing steals energy from the plant). Remove any slugs and snails (they love the protected environment of a forcing pot) along with any foliage, then cover over clumps with a large upturned bucket, dustbin, 'dalek' compost bin or fancy forcing pot (cover up any holes, too). I use old chimney pots and terracotta saucers. Keep peeking inside because the speed of forcing depends on the plant and the weather, then harvest the succulent shoots once they're large enough.

Forcing does exhaust plants, so only do so for four to six weeks, then remove all covers and allow clumps to recover (don't force these clumps next year). Forcing enthusiasts can even slice off clumps, pot them up and force in warmth for quicker results (discard these slices afterwards) – that's one of my life goals!

Lucy explains how forcing isn't just for rhubarb and that many other perennials such as artichokes (pictured) can be made to produce earlier

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Sow broad beans

✿ Did you follow my lead in autumn and sow some hardy broad beans? No? Well, not to worry – now is the ideal time to make it up to me! Spring sowings will mature just three or four weeks behind autumn-sown broad beans, especially if you choose quick-to-mature varieties such as 'De Monica' and 'Statissa'. If you have room, grow a swathe of these delicious hardy beans, as any gluts freeze incredibly well. Because soil conditions may well still be quite cold and wet, start off these spring varieties indoors or in a greenhouse/polytunnel now, in individual pots or large modules (or, ideally in 'rootrainers' or loo roll inner tubes because these bean seedlings produce deep, extensive roots). Very little heat is needed for germination – just a temperature of 6-10°C or so, so there's no need to fire up a costly propagator unless a long freezing spell is forecast. In fact, excess warmth produces leggy, soft plants that are vulnerable when planted out in April, so keep them lean and mean.

Loo roll inner tubes made perfect, sustainable broad bean planters

Step by step Heel in bare-root fruit

Many of us opt for buying bare-root fruit trees, canes and bushes during winter because they're frequently far cheaper than buying potted plants. Any time between December and March is a great time to get them planted properly – but only if soil conditions are right (i.e. not frozen or waterlogged). So, if they're not, what can you do? Let me explain:

1 As soon as your bare root plants are delivered, unpack them – don't leave them in their wrappings. If the roots dry out they'll shrivel and die (this is one of the main causes of bare-root plant failure). Place the roots in a bucket of water for a couple of hours to rehydrate them (not much longer).

2 You now have two choices, determined primarily by what ground conditions you have on your plot. Is there an empty bed that's frost-free and not waterlogged? Then temporarily 'plant' your bare-roots in there (this is called 'heeling in'). Now your plants will be perfectly happy till planting conditions improve.

3 If you don't have any spare beds, or if chosen areas are all frozen/ waterlogged, then option 'b' is for you. Find a large pot (or a few large pots), fill with any bagged compost you have, then temporarily plant your stock in there, watering it in well. Place in a frost-free shed or garage until soil conditions improve for planting.

Plant garlic

Top tip

✿While growers of autumn-planted garlic will no doubt be seeing shoots appearing above ground, many of us play catch-up by starting off some spring garlic, now. Whilst the resulting heads may not be as large as those set off in autumn, spring-planted garlic still gives a decent return if well fed, mulched and watered. Autumn garlic varieties perform best if they're exposed to a period of chilling, but spring-planted varieties frequently don't need such a cold spell and they bulk up quickly, too. Look for reliable spring types such as 'Solent Wight' and 'Picardy Wight'. Only split up the heads into individual cloves just before planting, and do so gently to deter bruising. The largest cloves give the largest heads, so prioritise these. Plant 4-5cm deep, 15-20cm apart in a sunny spot on well-drained soil, then harvest in July.

Right: Lucy explains how to get the best out of your early-planted cloves

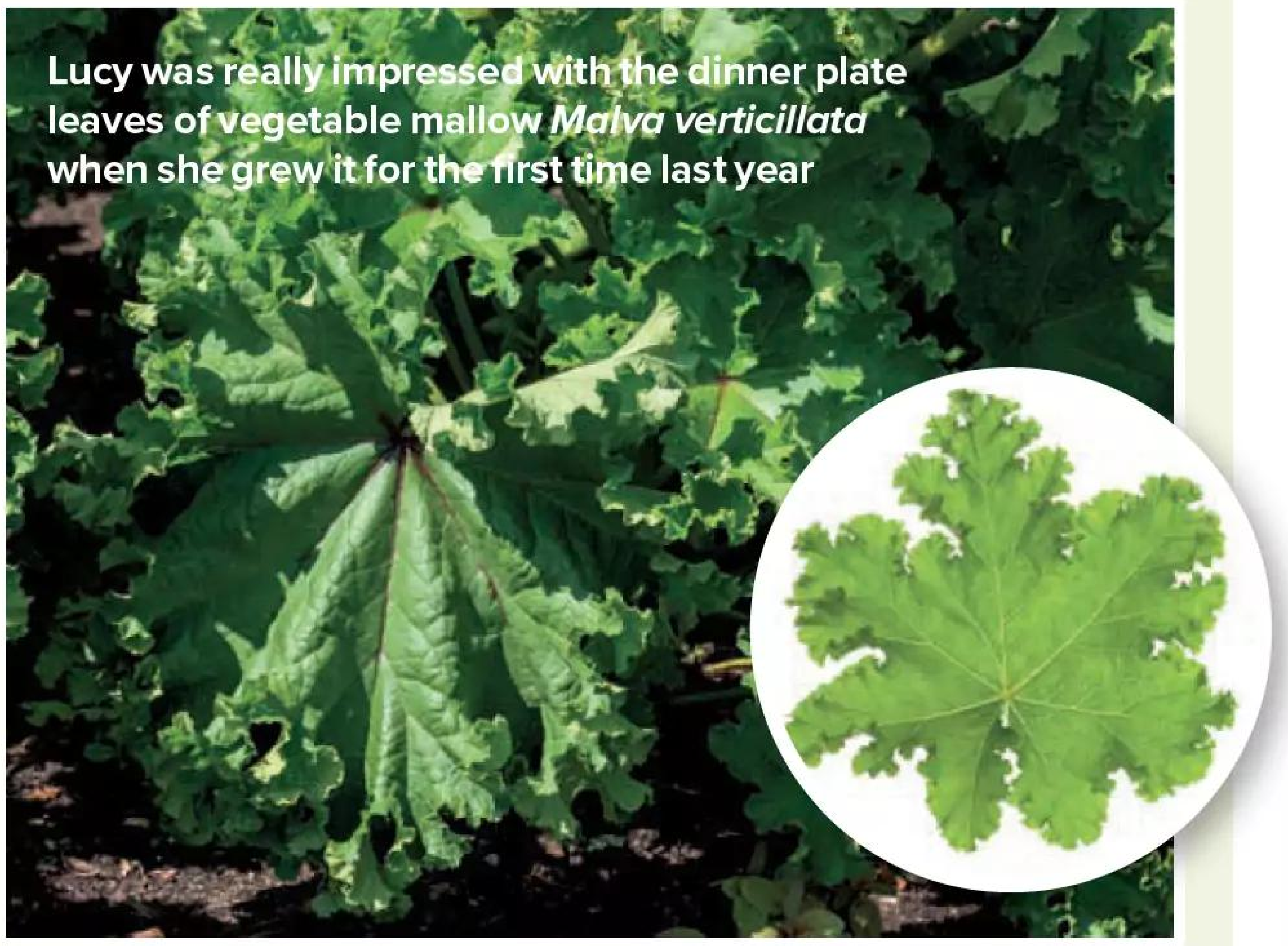
Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Why not try...?

Vegetable mallow

✿ Known botanically as *Malva verticillata* and also by the common name of Chinese mallow, I grew this edible for the first time last year (seeds are available from www.realseeds.co.uk) and was really impressed by the results. This plant grows like common mallow – on steroids. It germinates well (sow seeds in individual pots under cover in March) and then, once planted out into a sunny, sheltered spot during May, it romps away 'like billyo'. The leaves ultimately grow as large as dinnerplates, and shredded then wilted down in seasoned butter, they taste great. Plants can easily reach 1.2m (4ft) tall, and while the tiny pale pink flowers are insignificant, the rich green leaves have frilly edges, making this plant very ornamental. Vegetable mallow is annual, but can self-seed if allowed to for ease in subsequent years. It's a real winner.



Lucy was really impressed with the dinner plate leaves of vegetable mallow *Malva verticillata* when she grew it for the first time last year

5 quick jobs...

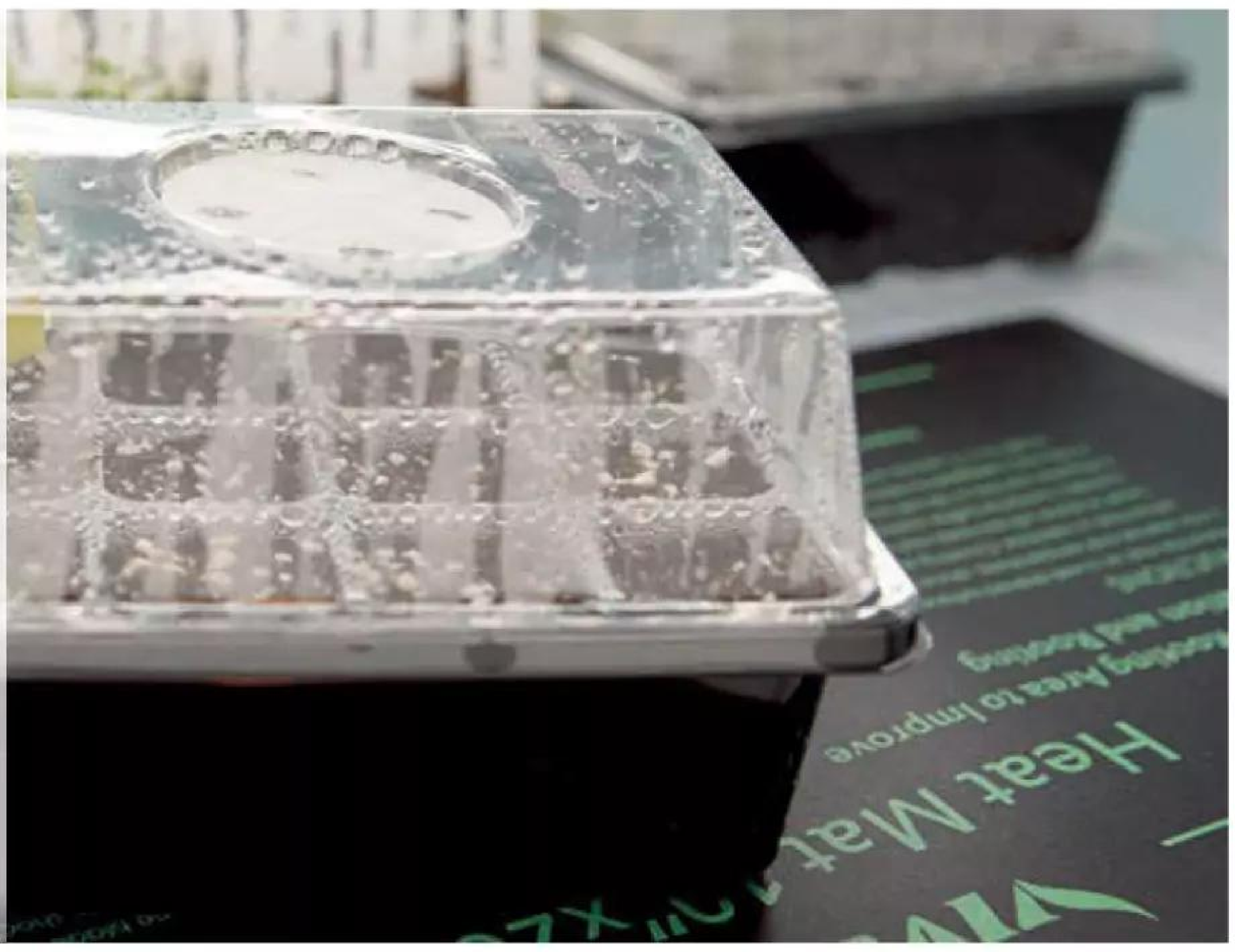
1 Celeriac is a delicious crop that needs a long growing season to slowly bulk up its gnarly 'roots'. Sow it now, under cover, in modules, ready to plant outside into a moist, fertile bed (a shady spot is fine) come early April. I'm finding that F1 hybrids like 'Neon' give larger yields on my sandy soil.

2 If you're making early sowings of long-season, tender crops like glasshouse tomatoes and peppers, warm your compost up by moving it into your propagation area before transplanting the resulting seedlings. Pricking out tender young plants into cold, wet compost will invite rots.

3 If your herb plants are looking a bit lacklustre, inject them with some renewed vigour before spring kicks off. Clump-forming perennials like mint, oregano, lemon balm and bergamot can be lifted, split into smaller divisions and then replanted into soil boosted by a little slow-release fertiliser.

4 Keep on harvesting kale, Brussels sprouts, leeks, chard, cabbages and other winter edibles. As soon as temperatures begin to rise in March, these plants will be triggered to flower (this is called 'bolting') which destroys their eating qualities. Cauliflower and leeks in cheese sauce, anyone?

5 Are you firing up your heated propagator in the next few weeks? Set it up early and check that the temperature is as you'll need it, using a thermometer that records the maximum and minimum readings. A plug-in thermostat is an effective way to keep the growing environment to your preferred range.



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Small space | Big ideas

With **Chris Collins**, Garden Organic's Head of Horticulture

How to grow apples organically

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How blue tits and wildlife can help with natural pest control

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Easy apple trees for small spaces

Chris Collins reveals how to grow your own apple trees in containers and compact areas

The apple is a quintessential fruit, only rivalled by the strawberry in terms of recognition and usage in the UK. Yet the origins of this British stalwart are far away in Kazakhstan – and it was the Romans who first introduced apple trees to our shores.

Since then, more than 2,000 varieties of this amazing plant have been bred and grown. Many of these are of a heritage nature, making them an important genetic database and a symbol of the truly international nature of horticulture and plant growing.

If you can only garden in a restricted space, the possibility of growing your own fresh organic apples probably feels out of reach - but I'm glad to tell you this is not the case. Dwarf apples will happily thrive in a container given the right care. Choose self-fertilising varieties on restricting root stocks such as 'Gala', 'Egremont Russet' and 'Falstaff'. They will produce fruit on restricted substrate, keeping to around 2m (6.5ft) in height.

Make sure the roots have plenty of room - a pot with a diameter of 50cm (20in) will suffice. Use a decent loam-based compost with some organic compost mixed in. Apple trees prefer a sunny spot out of strong wind, especially if growing on a balcony. Sheltering them next to a climber on an outward trellis or railings will take the sting out of the winds.

Liquid feed using a good organic fertiliser, little and often in the growing season, and never forget to water. Apples do not enjoy being dry, so keep the compost damp while the plant is in leaf. Drying out will cause leaf margins to go brown and flowers to drop, meaning less fruit.

Stick to these rules and that delicious homegrown, organic apple crumble will soon be beckoning!

APPLE IDENTIFICATION
LOOK OUT FOR OUR BARE ROOT MAIDEN APPLE TREES

© Chris Collins

Chris checking out some of the latest available apple varieties

For more organic gardening advice – for gardens big and small - head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to support the charity by becoming a member.

Small space Q&A

Q I'd like to grow apple trees on my veg patch – what would you recommend?

A You can buy bare root espalier or cordon forms now – and these are bred deliberately to save space. They're perfect for edging a bed or raised border. The variety 'Sunset' reaches 25cm (10in) in height and is less than 1m (3ft) wide.

Q How do I look after my tree once it's planted

A Cut back one-year-old strong growth from the previous year, leaving two buds as this will encourage flowering and fruiting. Remove any crossing, damaged or rubbing wood. I like to top-dress with well-rotted farmyard manure when a tree is first planted and then again the following spring.

Q Will an apple tree attract wildlife?

A Yes, like all fruit trees, apples provide blossom for bees and other insects, and fallen fruit and nesting sites for birds. Encourage apple-loving earwigs and blue tits, and they will also protect your trees, and other fruit and veg, from pests such as aphids. Self-fertile apples are great for pollinators as they encourage movement between gardens.

22 ideas for money-saving magic!

Editor **Kim Stoddart** reveals lots of easy and enjoyable ways to save money in the garden this year

Having first properly experimented with ways of cost-free gardening more than a decade ago, the sheer feel-good factor of transforming the unloved into the useful and waste into something wondrous has stayed with me firmly ever since.

It can be so empowering to rescue and revive something that would otherwise go to landfill, and to find inventive ways of working with materials you might already have to hand. It saves money and boosts resilience as well as helping one to garden in a more sustainable way, knowing that you aren't completely reliant on buying everything in.

I highly recommend having some good, honest green-fingered fun in the process.

Get inventive with planters

Have a look around your home to see what you can find to work with, and browsing in charity shops can also offer up some exciting planter potentials, especially for houseplants and windowsill growing.

See what cuttings you can take from friends and family gardens

This can be done throughout the year, but February is a good time for hardwood cuttings which can include any of the currants, as well as roses, cornus and other delights.

Check out local seed swapping events

This is a lovely way to meet other gardeners in your area and enjoy excited green-fingered chatter. It's also a good way to source locally-resilient seed for your growing space.

Grow perennial crops

I wrote about this in the last issue and there are many exciting varieties of perennial edibles now available to buy for longer-lasting year-on-year returns.

Get some pallets

These are generally free (or cheap) to source from local garden centres, builders' merchants and the like and they can be used in a number of exciting ways.

Making your own compost has to be one of the best money-saving activities going

Above: Some of the thrifty container planters in Kim's home

Divide perennials

This can sometimes be done when buying in plants so you obtain two for the price of one. Also, some perennials in your garden (such as rhubarb) need root division after a few years to keep them productive, which means more plants to go around for you and also for use in swapsies with gardening chums.

A planting bench made out of old pallets and salvaged wood

An old window used to create a makeshift cold frame during winter

Source some manure and mulch materials in your area

From obtaining wood chip from your local tree surgeon to making leaf mould in your garden from autumn's fallen leaves, the opportunities for free-to-source soil improvers are ripe for the taking. Andrew Oldham talks about the different types of soil-improving manure on P40.

Reuse old compost from planters and pots as a mulch

Speaking of mulches, there's still life in spent compost. Just add it to borders and beds and it will help improve soil structure and the ground's ability to stand firm through the tail end of winter.

Make use of waste items

From cardboard (compost ingredient and weed suppressor as Ruth Hayes shows on P9) to plastic bottles (impromptu cloche or seedling planters) try and think if you can find a use for items that pass through your home.

Grow on kitchen leftovers

There are many materials that can be worked with and it is great fun to experiment. From home-grown ginger and turmeric plants, to avocado houseplants, micro greens and plants from spice seed, see what you can nurture to prosper and grow.

Reuse old plastic plant pots

Turn the idea of single use on its unsustainable head by making use of plastic pots already in circulation and save money in the process.

Check out the reduced plant section at your local garden centre

The unloved and a little weedy can often (with a little TLC) become the productive and wondrous. Just look for plants that need repotting, watering, and which appear fundamentally healthy, and grab yourself a bargain - or several.

Check old seed - it may still be useable

With the exception of parsnip, many varieties of seed (including edible) can still be grown past the recommended use by date. Place a few seeds on moist tissue for a few days in a sunny, warm spot to see if they start to sprout.

Harvest water as much as you can

Water butts are readily available to buy in all different shapes and sizes, and even a makeshift bin can be used to collect readily available supplies for use (and money saving) during the dryer months of the year in your garden.

Reuse plant labels and make your own

This is easy to do by just cleaning old labels with vinegar and making your own with any available plastic, such as plastic milk cartons.

Make your own plant supports

From hazel and dogwood to willow, there are many ways locally available wood can be used to create bean supports, hoops and other supportive garden structures. Why not get creative with what you can find in your garden?

Make your soil life the best it can be

Employing techniques such as no-dig and mulching will help encourage beneficial soil life, the microbes, fungi and minibeasts, which will improve your soil and the plants growing within it and reduce costs longer term.

Grow from seed

Nurturing plants into life from seed is incredibly enjoyable, and bought-in blooms and plants can all add up, so do what you can with the space you have to hand. Just pay heed to Bob Flowerdew's advice on P66 and invest in the best quality peat-free seed compost you can as it will save money and boost results over the months ahead.

Save money by seed sowing

Mix plants to help with natural pest control efforts

It makes it much harder for pests to nibble your crops when the same varieties aren't block planted together and so readily available.

Give your tools a maintaining once-over

A quick oil and sharpen and your tools will look and work as good as new for the year ahead.

Seed save where you can

It's such an enjoyable thing to do, saving money, creating more locally adapted seed and it's great for wildlife to boot. Toby Buckland talks about seed sovereignty and seed saving on P62 and also explains 'landrace' seeds that thrive in our own individual plots

Make your own compost

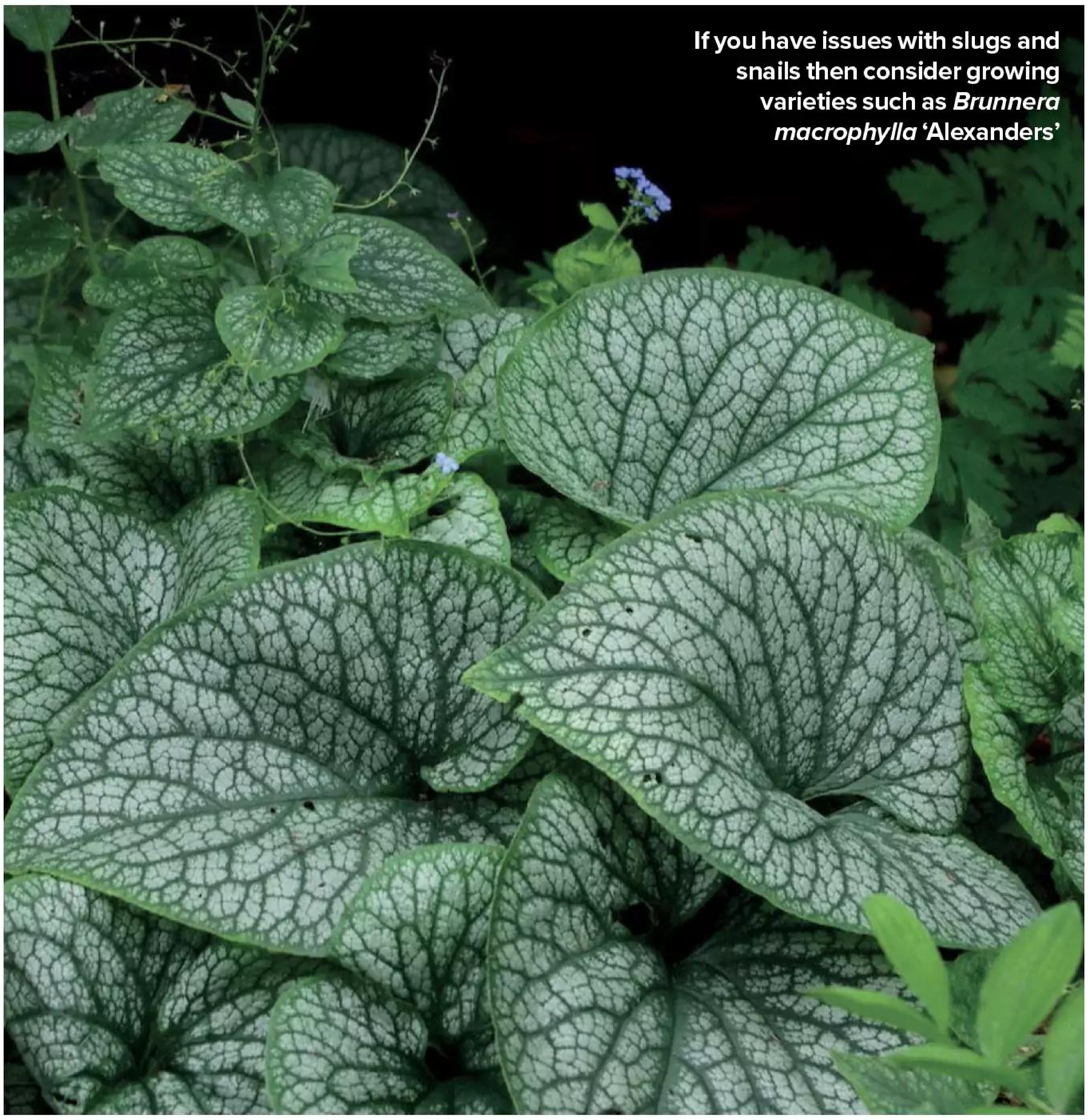
Last, but certainly not least, because compost making is one of the best money-saving, garden-improving activities going. Turning household and garden waste into a most lovely crumbly soil improver to boost the garden is priceless in the best possible sense.

Above: Polyculture planted gardens help with natural pest control

PHOTO: JULIE SKELTON

MASTERCLASS

With **Julia Boulton,** Beth Chatto's granddaughter and chief custodian of the world-famous gardens, and her team



If you have issues with slugs and snails then consider growing varieties such as *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Alexanders'

All images © Beth Chatto Gardens

Five of the best brunnera

Find out how to grow this lovely low-maintenance, mainly pest-free alternative to hostas

Looking for a low-maintenance plant? Brunnera is a brilliant choice for a shady spot. Resistant to any major pests and diseases, it's a perfect alternative to hostas if you are plagued by slugs and snails in your garden. There are three species, mostly derived from *Brunnera macrophylla* (meaning 'large-leaved').

Known as the great forget-me-not or Siberian bugloss, it thrives in shady spots but can handle some dryness - just avoid full sun to prevent scorching. During April and May, blue or white flowers appear alongside heart-shaped leaves which come in beautiful forms, including silver to cream variegations and spotted patterns.

For a second flush of foliage and, hopefully, flowers in autumn, cut back when flowering has finished in late spring/early summer.

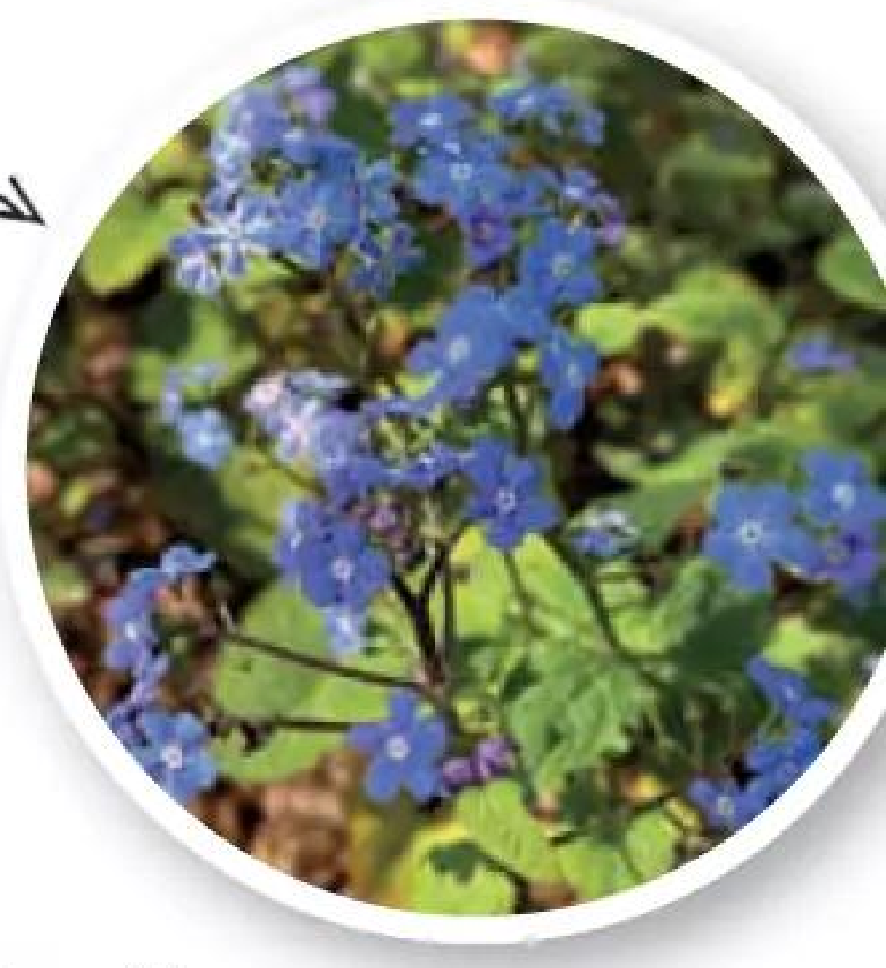
Wildlife credentials with our Dr Chris Gibson

The flowers are visited by smaller bees and bee-flies that are happy to forage under shade. Steps should be taken to avoid the plants escaping from gardens as their dense, ground-cover foliage can eliminate native species from natural habitats.

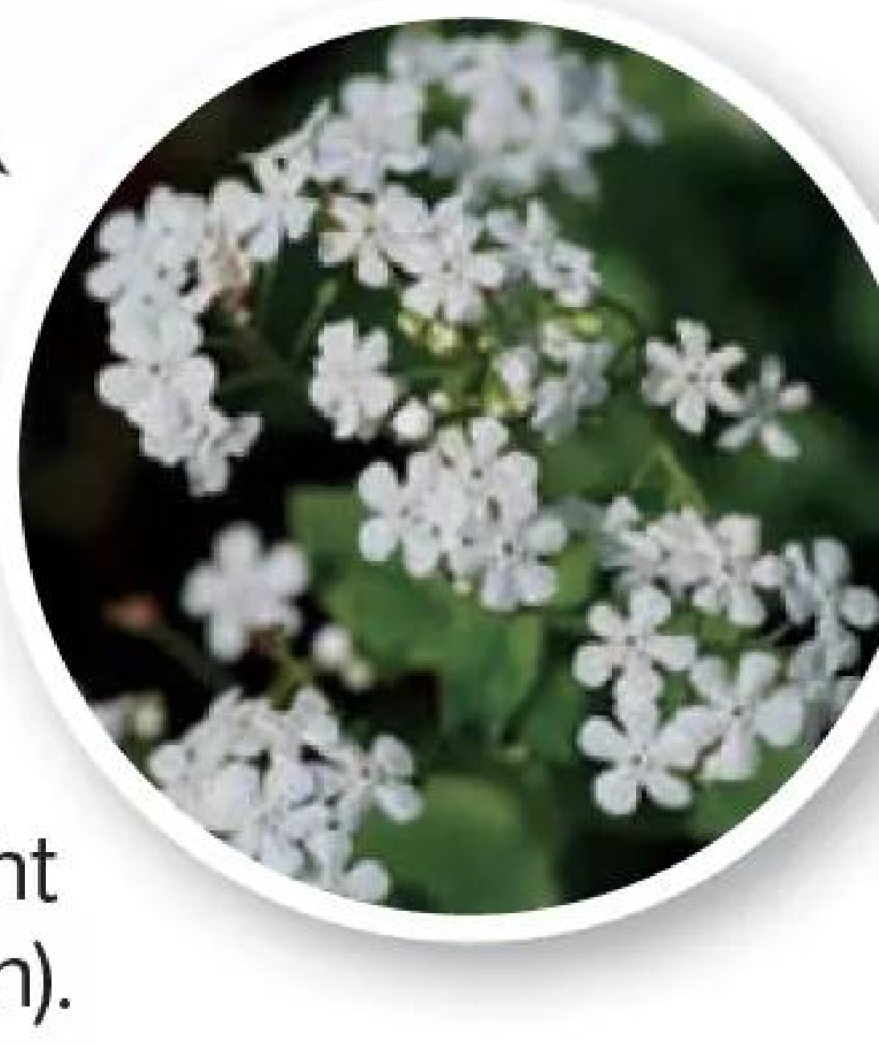
Goes well with

Foxglove (*Digitalis sp*)
Ferns
Hostas
Melic grass (*Melica sp*)
Pachysandras

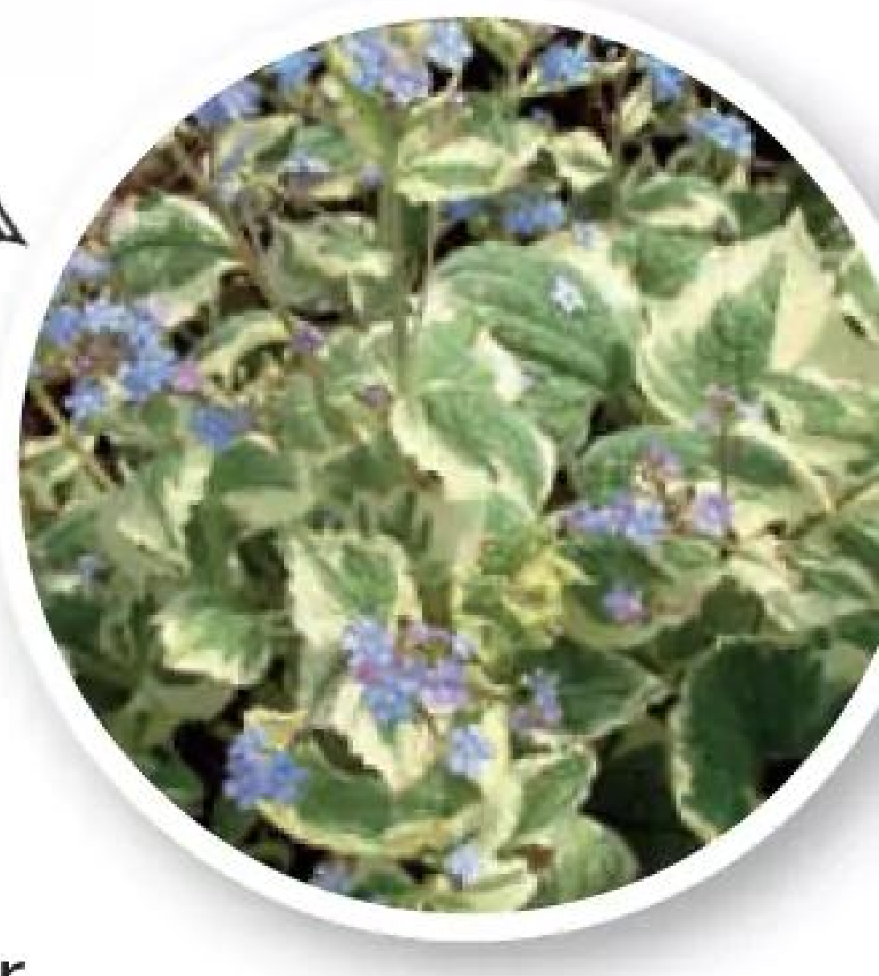
Some of our favourites:



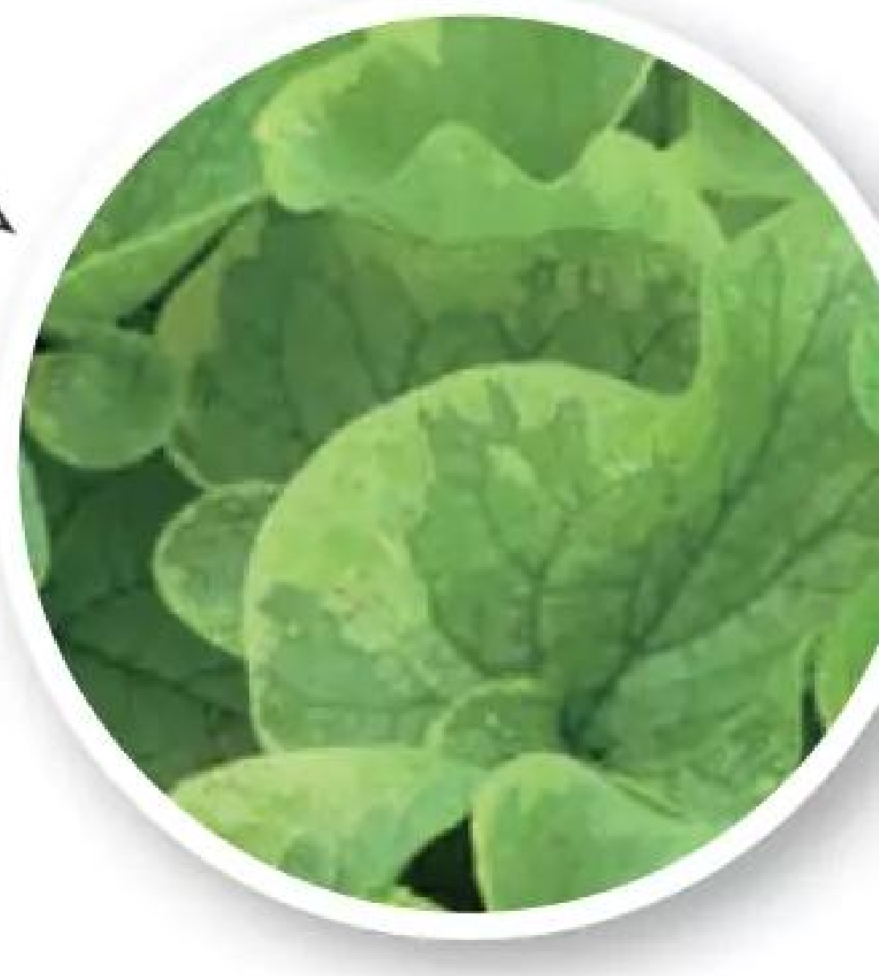
Brunnera macrophylla
In spring, long sprays of tiny forget-me-not blue flowers are followed by robust clumps of basal leaves, each huge and heart-shaped, making good groundcover in shade. It will tolerate sunnier positions, but with reduced size. Height and spread: 40x60cm (15x60in).



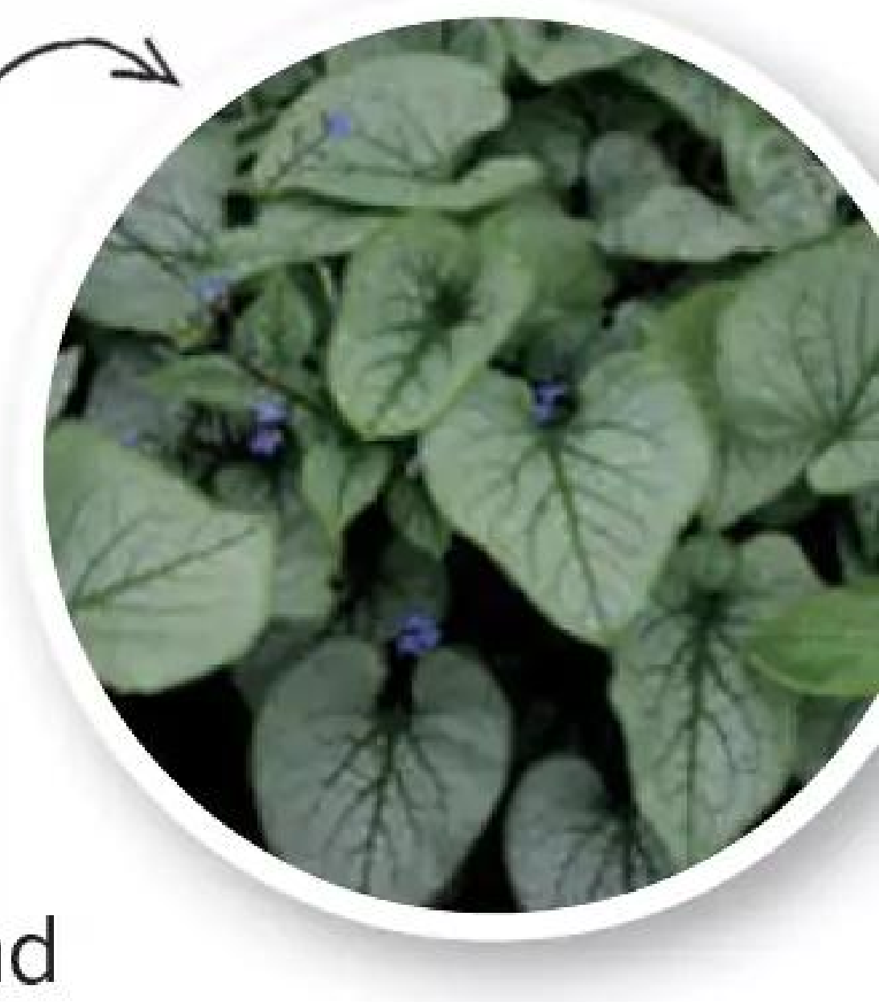
Brunnera macrophylla
'Betty Bowring'
Has sprays of pure white forget-me-not like flowers, larger than many other brunnera, which float above large matt-green leaves. Height and spread: 40x50cm (15x20in).



Brunnera macrophylla
'Dawson's White'
Heart shaped leaves are boldly variegated, deep-green and creamy-white, some almost entirely white. Needs careful placing, protected from sun scorch or wind damage, in soil that never dries out. Height and spread: 30x60cm (1x2ft).



Brunnera macrophylla
'Hadspen Cream'
Large, light green leaves are irregularly bordered with primrose which dissolves partially into the centre. Gentler colouring than *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Dawson's White' but needs partial shade and a retentive soil. Height and spread 45x60cm (18x24in).



Brunnera macrophylla
'Looking Glass'
Great in shady spot, where the almost entirely silver foliage will show off to its best effect. The typical sprays of blue flowers follow in spring. Cut back tired foliage to encourage a second flush of silver-coloured leaves. Height and spread: 50x50cm (20x20in).

You can find out more about these world-famous gardens and these Brunnera varieties at **www.bethchatto.co.uk**

DON'T MISS THE PERFECT TIME TO PLANT

Pink patio plant perfection!

Lavatera Mallow 'Barnsley Baby'

TOTALLY WINTER HARDY

Pot-filling blooms, month after month

LOOK! SAVE UP TO £40.00!

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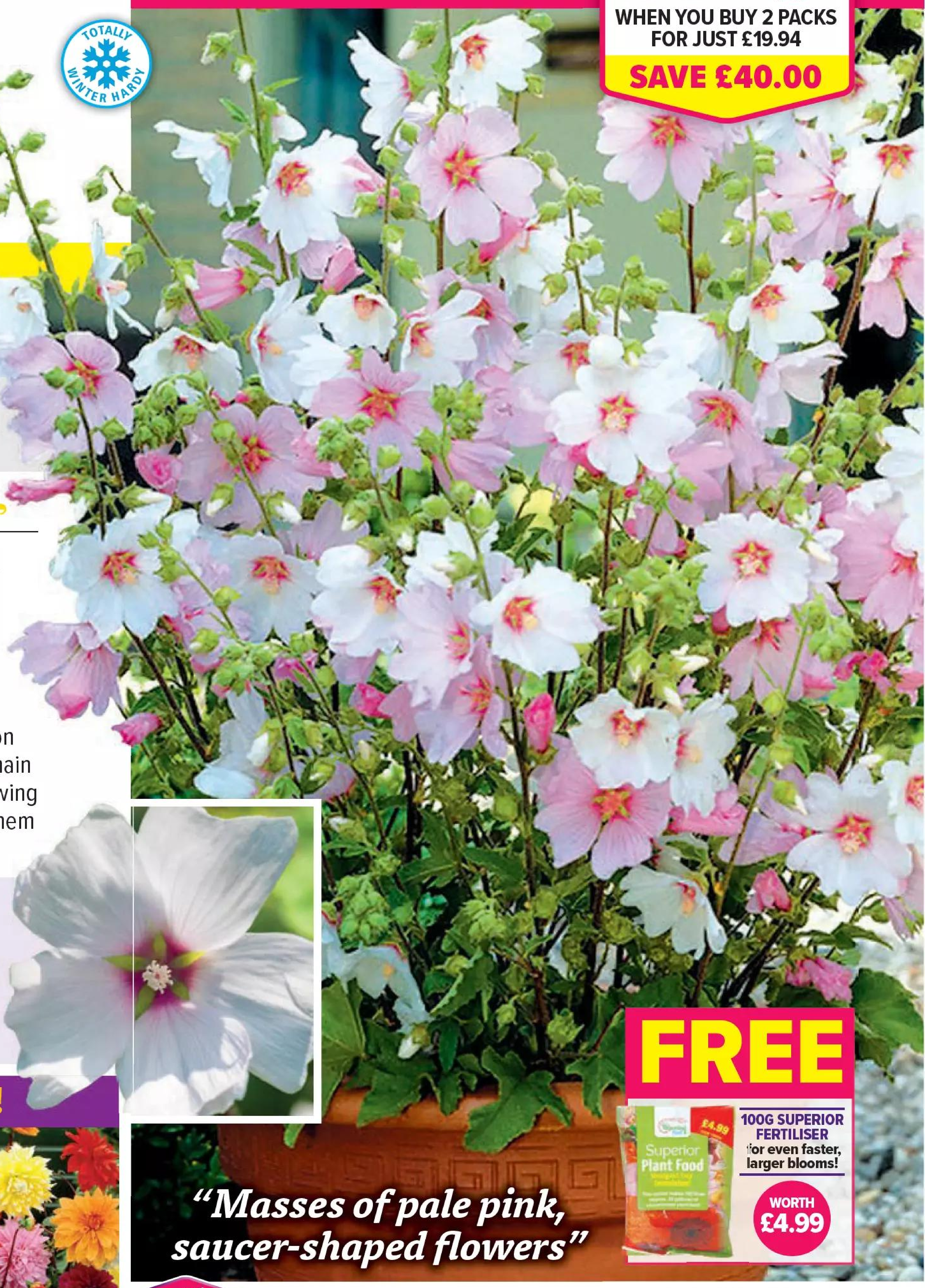

"Masses of pale pink, saucer-shaped flowers"

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18 extra feel-good roses

Buying rose plants that support the work of charities is a great way to share the love, says **Sue Bradley**

Gardens can arguably never have too many roses, and February is a great month to look for something special. Whether shrub, climbing, rambling or ground covering, roses are the perfect choice for adding colour and often perfume to beds and borders. And if this isn't justification enough to reach for the credit card, some help raise money for good causes too.

Whether they have a meaningful title or are named in honour of a well-known person who has become a figurehead for a particular charity, a portion of the price of each plant is, or has been in the past, donated to support vital work.

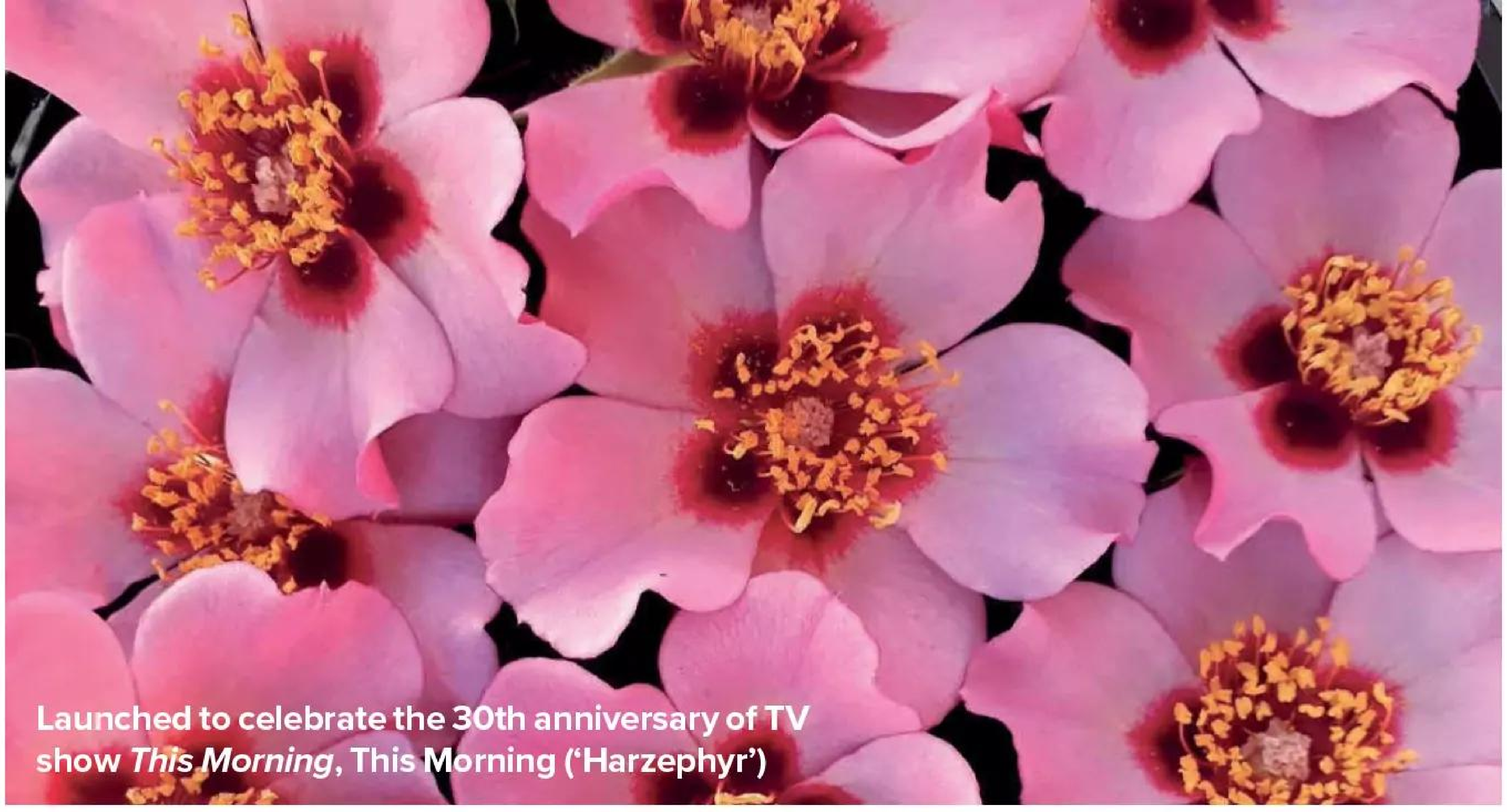
Remembering Dianne

Dianne Oxberry was one of the BBC's longest-serving presenters. During the 1980s she appeared as part of the 'posse' on *Steve Wright in the Afternoon* – earning the affectionate nickname 'Northern' - and later alongside Simon Mayo and Rod Mackenzie on the flagship *Radio 1 Breakfast Show*. Subsequently, she presented the weather on the BBC's *North West Tonight* and on one occasion her live report was 'gatecrashed' by the comedian Peter Kay who famously remarked: "Dianne Oxberry...God love her...you've made it sunshine for everybody."

Such was Dianne's popularity that there was a mass outpouring of grief after she died in January 2019, shortly after being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, leaving behind her children and husband, Ian Hindle. The Florida Sunset Rose ('Tan12639') raises money for the Dianne Oxberry Trust, which seeks to raise awareness of Ovarian Cancer symptoms to the 800,000 women across the North West who are in the most at risk group for the disease. It was named in memory of Dianne and Ian's fondness for watching the sunsets in Florida, which it mirrors with its pink double blooms that darken to a deep pink near the centre. A bed of these repeat-flowering hybrid tea roses has been planted at BBC North West in her memory. Sales of Florida Sunset by Fryer's Roses and Blue Diamond Garden Centres have raised £607 for the charity over the past year. *www.dianneoxberrytrust.org*

Sales of Florida Sunset by Fryer's Roses and Blue Diamond Garden Centres have raised money for *www.dianneoxberrytrust.org*

© Blue Diamond Garden


Launched to celebrate the 30th anniversary of TV show *This Morning*, This Morning ('Harzephyr')

© Harkness roses

Roses that share the love

This Morning ('Harzephyr')

This pretty single-flowered patio shrub rose with a medium fragrance was launched to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the TV show *This Morning*, with a percentage of sales supporting the work of the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds. It has pink blooms that darken to maroon in the centre, with amber stamens, and produces plenty of hips in autumn. Grow This Morning in borders or pots.

Type of rose: Patio
Height: Up to 90cm (3ft)
Spread: Up to 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: RSPB
Rose company: Harkness

Dannahue ® ('Ausa6b15')

A compact and shapely, upright and bushy shrub that produces plenty of apricot-coloured flowers with a zesty fragrance with notes of lemon, lychees and fresh apricots. Named in honour of Danny Clarke, it thrives in containers and against walls and fences in shadier areas, making it a great choice for modern living.

Type of rose: English shrub
Height: 110cm (3 ½ ft)
Spread: 125cm (4ft)
Charity supported: Raised £10,000 for Grow2Know when released. The charity wants to inspire, heal and educate through horticulture – embarking on a journey to make gardening more inclusive and nature accessible to all.
Rose company: David Austin Roses

© Sutterstock

This delightful rose Dannahue ® ('Ausa6b15') in honour of gardening charity Grow2know

© Jonathan Buckley for David Austin roses

A pretty apricot-yellow repeat-flowering rose Reach for the Stars ('Tantau Barok')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

Reach for the Stars ('Tantau Barok')

This repeat-flowering climber produces fragrant large double blooms that emerge in an apricot-yellow and change to peach when they're opening. These are complemented by dark green, glossy foliage. This tall-grower is a great choice for pergolas and arches in full sun.

Type of rose: Climbing
Height: 2–3m (6.6ft–10ft)
Spread: 1.5m (5ft)
Charity supported: Alder Hey Children's Charity
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

Dame Deborah James ('Hareasterly')

Big blousy white blooms with a hint of blushed pink as the petals reach the centre make this rose, named after bowel cancer campaigner Dame Deborah James, a real stunner. This repeat flowerer has a delicate fragrance.

Type of rose: Bush
Height Up to 90cm (3ft)
Spread: Up to 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK
Rose company: Harkness

Old English-style rose, Sunset Isle ('Tanjga')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

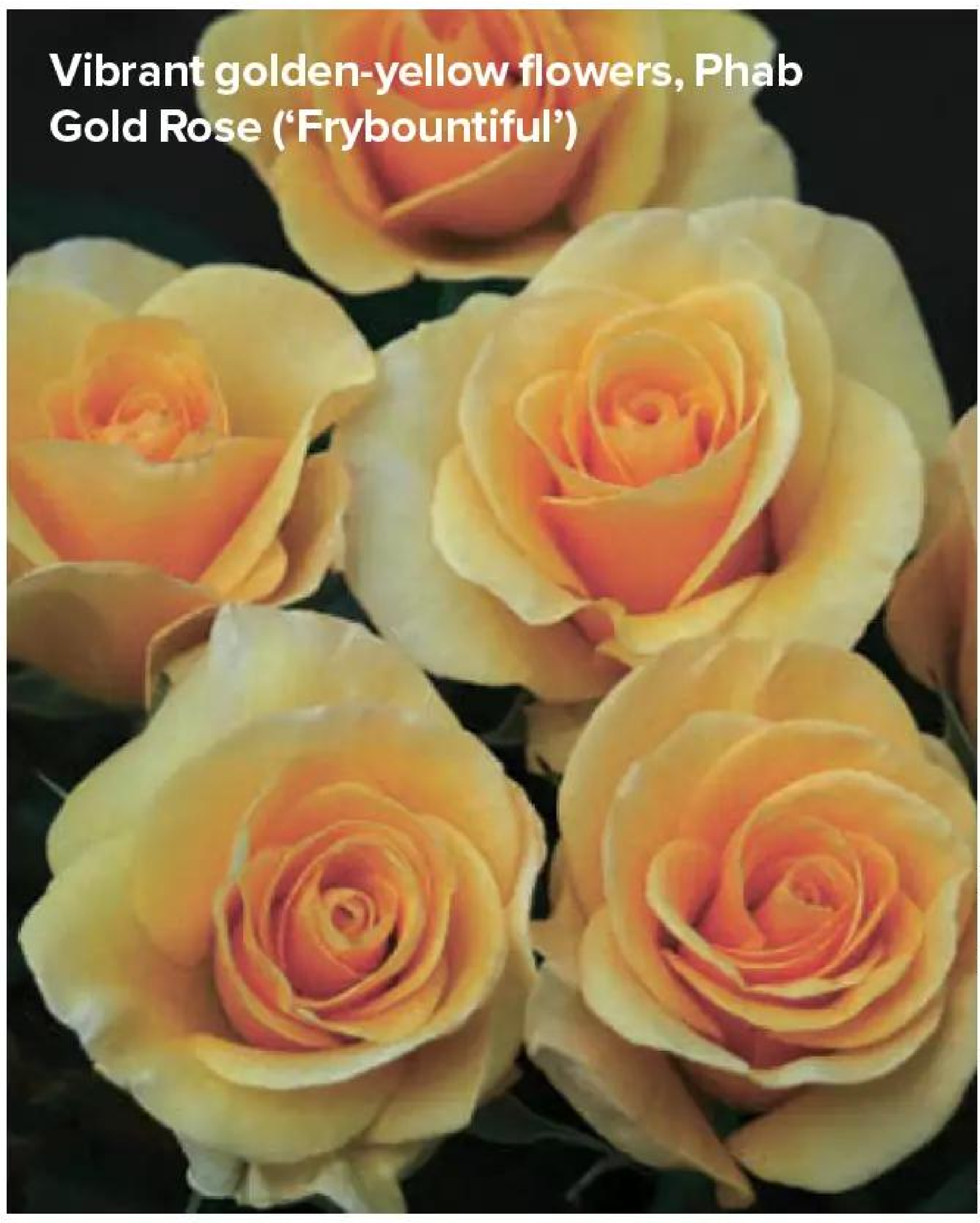
Sunset Isle ('Tanjga')

Launched in 2023, this beautiful pale pink rose was named in memory of Gill Crawford's brother Richard, who enjoyed watching sunsets on his beloved Orkney. Repeat-flowering, and with old English-style double blooms, this plant produces glossy green foliage and is said to have excellent disease resistance. Plant in full sun.

Type of rose: Shrub
Height: Approx 70cm (2ft)
Spread: Approx 70cm (2ft)
Charity supported: MND Scotland (Motor Neurone Disease)
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

A classic stunner of a rose by Harkness Dame Deborah James (Hareasterly)

© Harkness roses

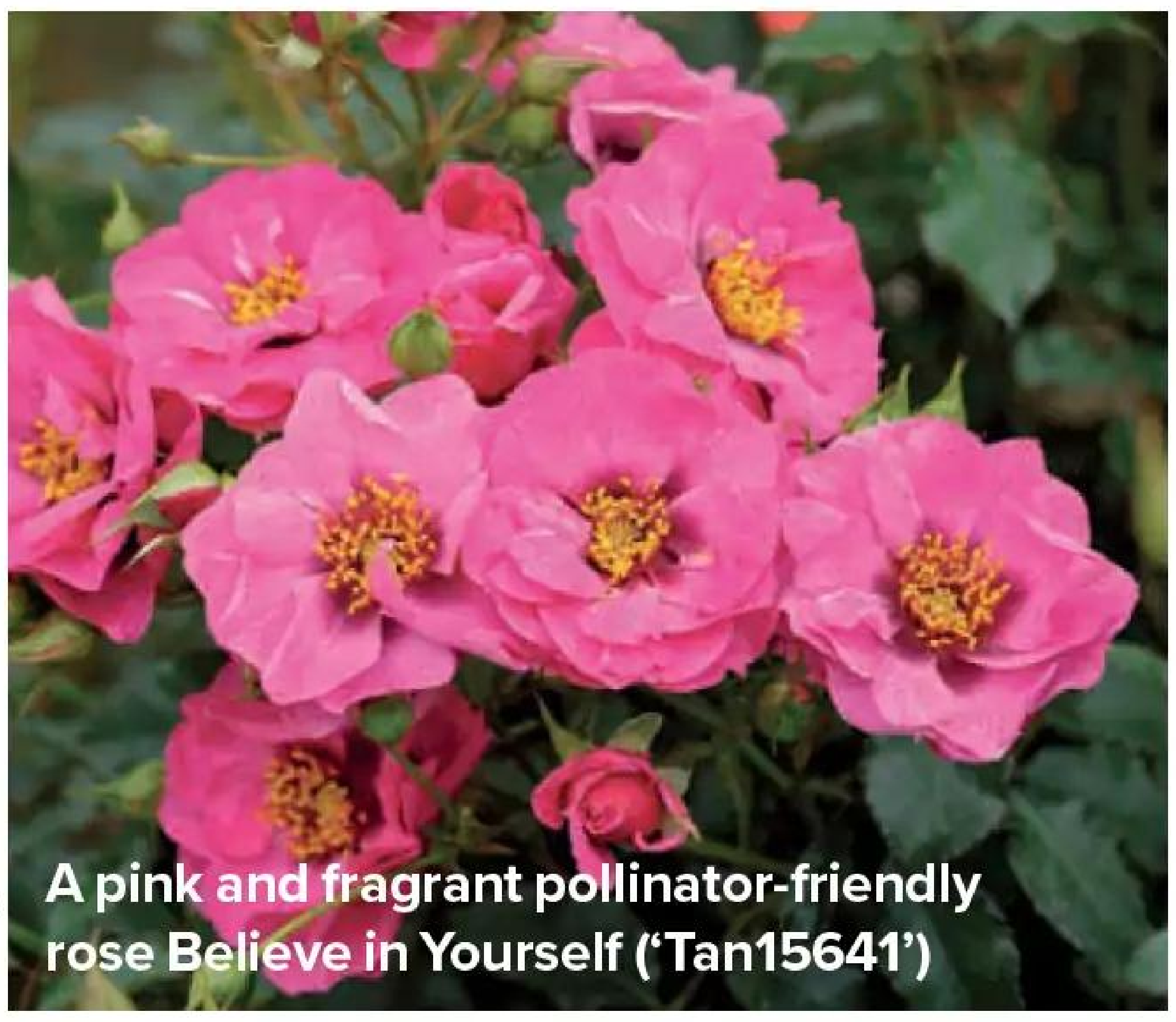


Vibrant golden-yellow flowers, Phab Gold Rose ('Frybountiful')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

Phab Gold Rose ('Frybountiful')
Dating back to 2007, when the charity Phab celebrated 50 years, this repeat-flowering rose produces clusters of vibrant golden-yellow blooms and has glossy mid-green foliage. Grow in full sun in beds, borders or containers.
Type of rose: Bushy floribunda
Height: Approx 50 cm (1.6ft)
Spread: Approx 50 cm (1.6ft)
Charity supported: Phab – inspires and supports disabled and non-disabled people to make more of life together
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

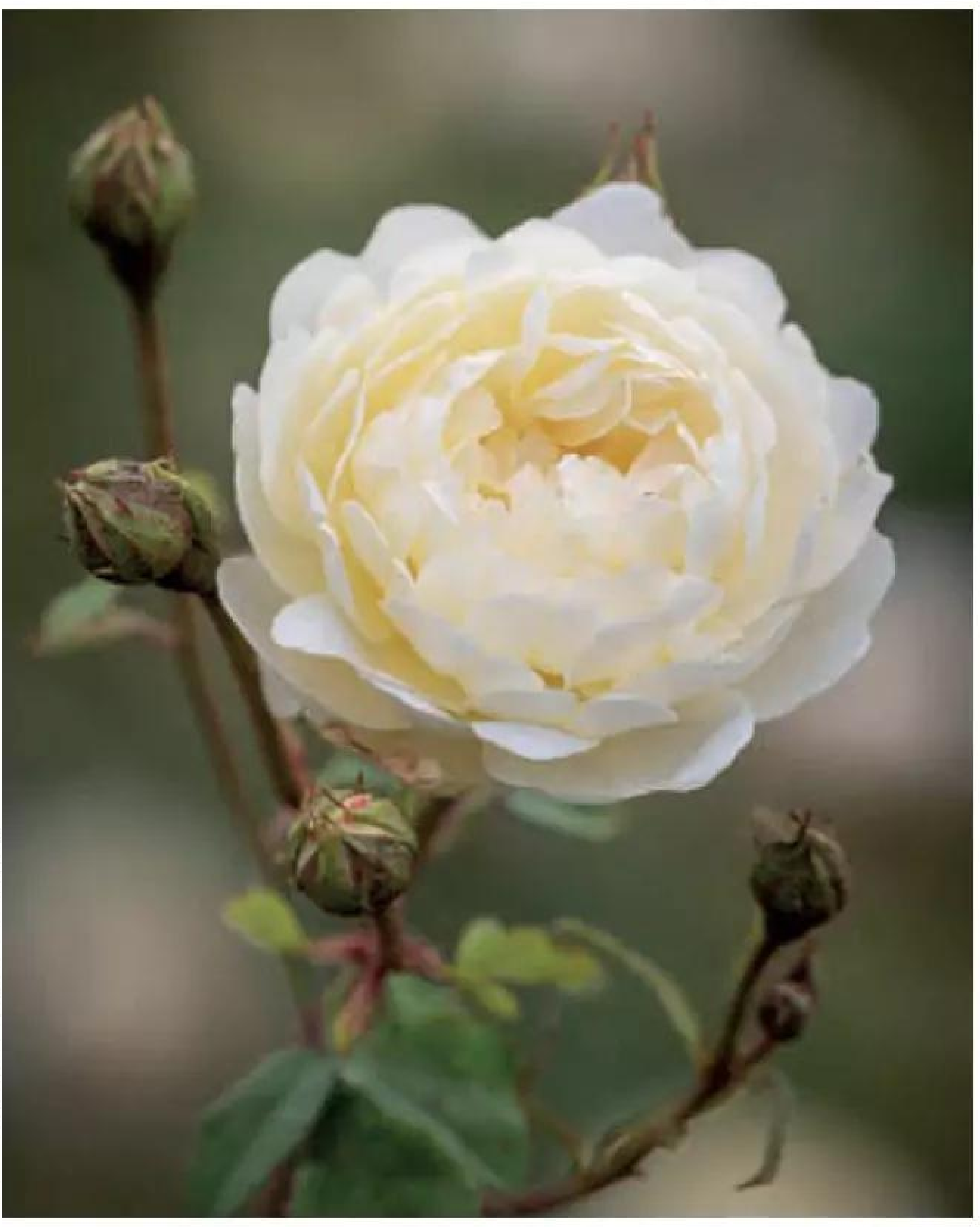
Believe in Yourself ('Tan15641')
Clusters of pollinator-friendly pink and fragrant single blooms make Believe in Yourself a great choice for a sunny spot. Launched at the 2024 RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival, this repeat-flowerer has glossy green foliage too.
Type of rose: Shrub
Height: Approx 50-80cm (18-31in)
Spread: Approx 40-50cm (15-19in)
Charity supported: The Stroke Association
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres



A pink and fragrant pollinator-friendly rose Believe in Yourself ('Tan15641')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

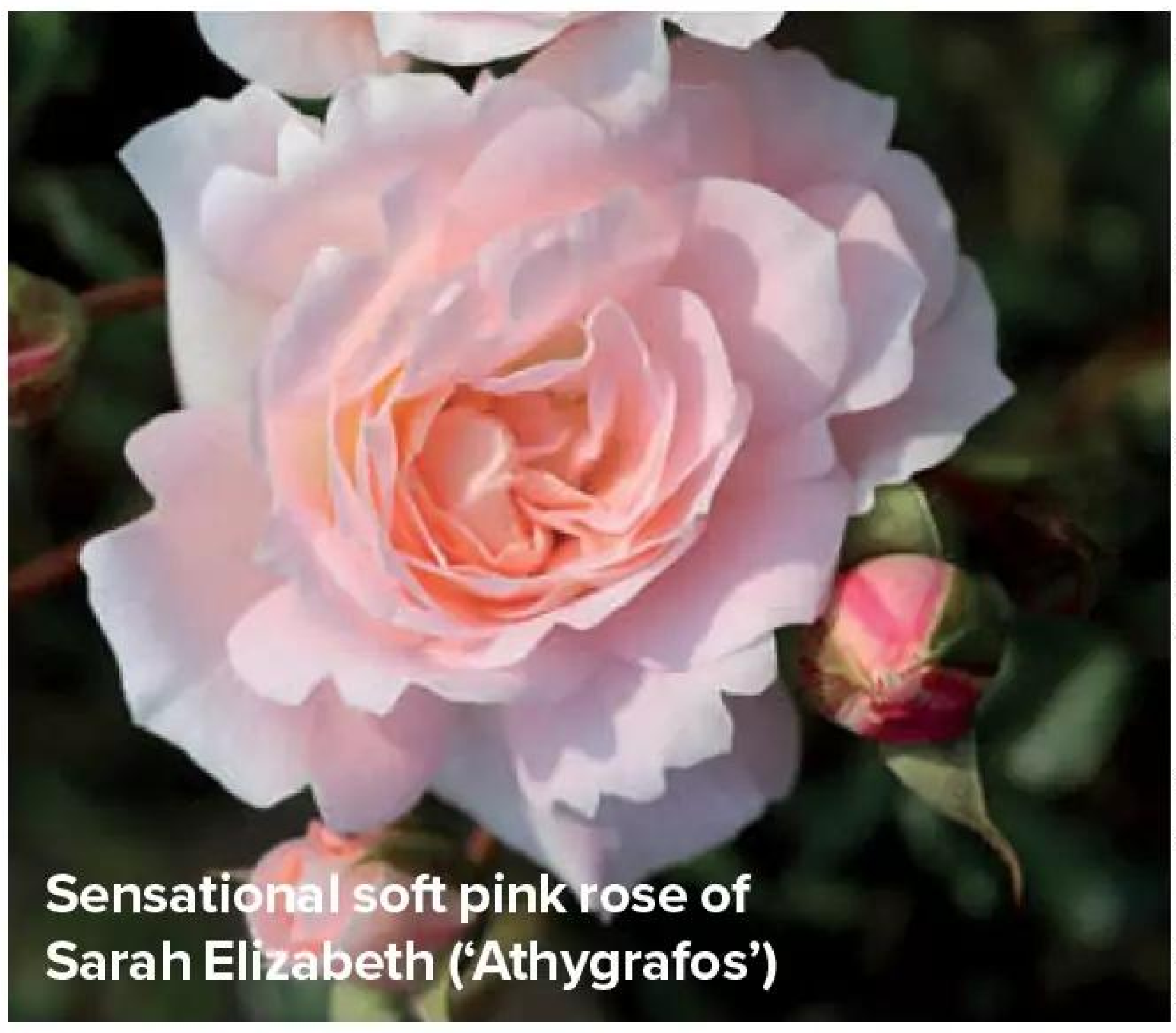
An eye-catching stunner of a rose with a soft myrrh scent Nye Bevan ('Auspital')



© Jonathan Buckley

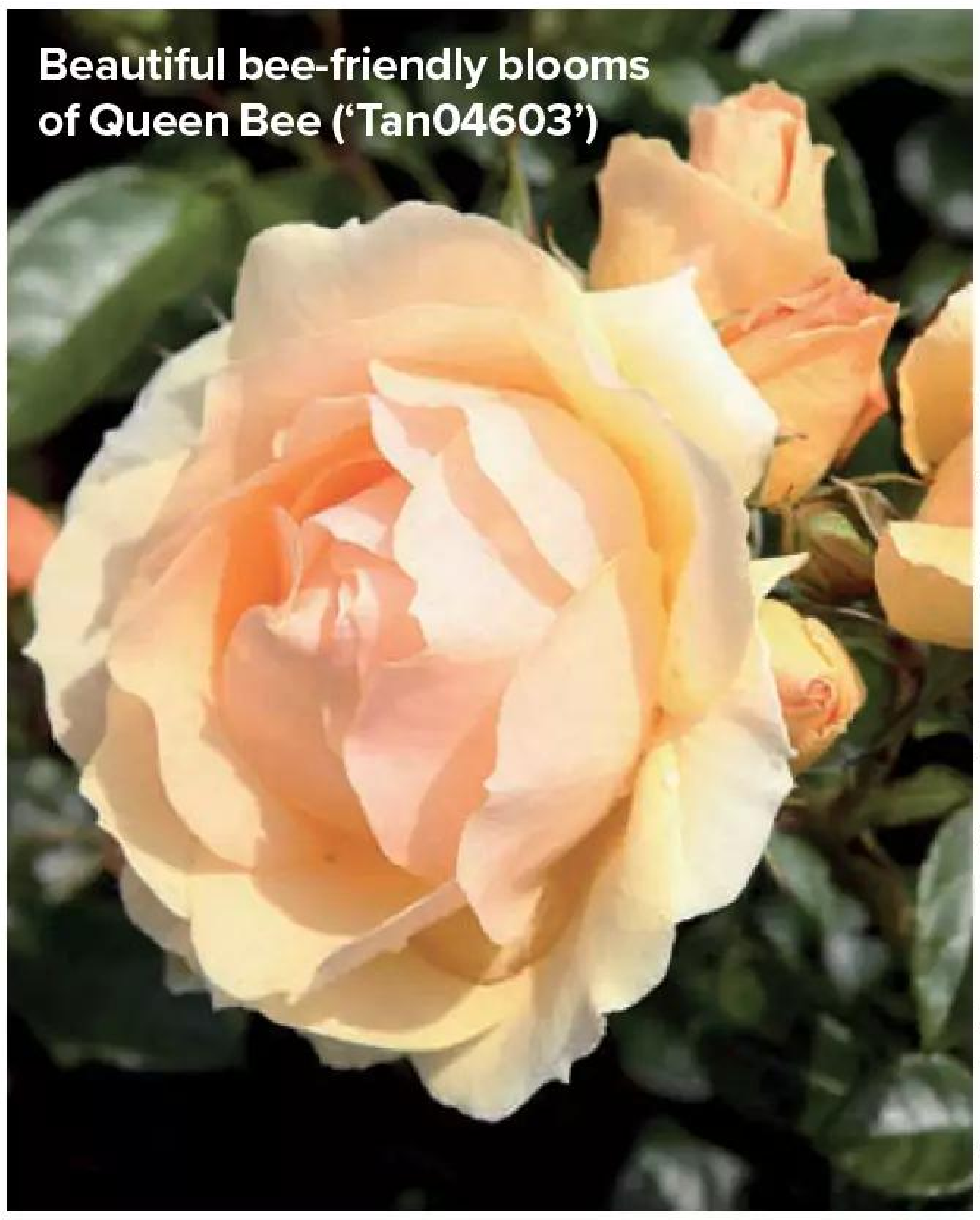
Nye Bevan ('Auspital')
This rose has unusual open-cupped flowers of a soft yellow paling to cream, with a soft myrrh fragrance. Its scallop-shaped, incurved petals are arranged around a mass of golden stamens. The first flush of flowers are borne in sprays against mid-green, semi-glossy foliage. This rose forms an upright bush. Remove hips to encourage repeat flowering.
Type of rose: English shrub
Height: 110cm (3 ½ ft)
Spread: 75cm (2 ½ ft)
Charity supported: NHS Charities Together, with more than £60,000 raised
Rose company: David Austin Roses

Sarah Elizabeth ('Athygrafos')
This fragrant soft pink repeat-flowering rose produces clusters of blooms and dark green foliage. It's great for beds and borders in full sun.
Type of rose: Floribunda shrub
Height: 1m (3ft)
Spread: 80-90cm (31-35in)
Charity supported: Groves Foundation, which creates life changing initiatives to enhance young people's lives
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres



Sensational soft pink rose of Sarah Elizabeth ('Athygrafos')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres



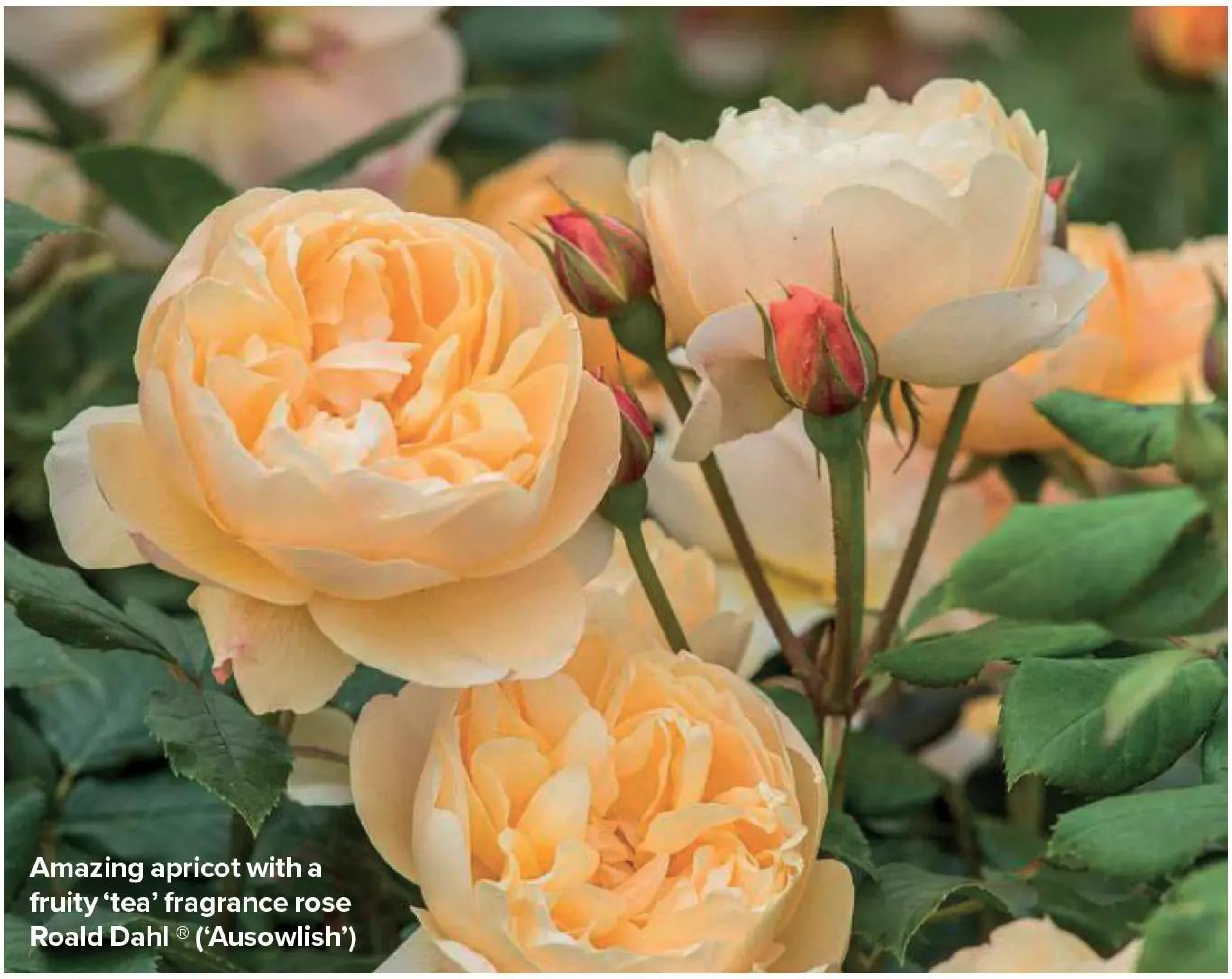
Beautiful bee-friendly blooms of Queen Bee ('Tan04603')

© Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

Queen Bee ('Tan04603')
This repeat-flowering rose's eye-catching clusters of amber-yellow flowers mature to open-cupped blooms that are attractive to bees. It also produces olive green foliage that's very glossy. Plant in beds and borders in full sun.
Type of rose: Floribunda shrub
Height: 80cm (2.6ft)
Spread: 60–70cm (1.9-2ft)
Charity supported: The Soil Association
Rose company: Fryer's Roses & Blue Diamond Garden Centres

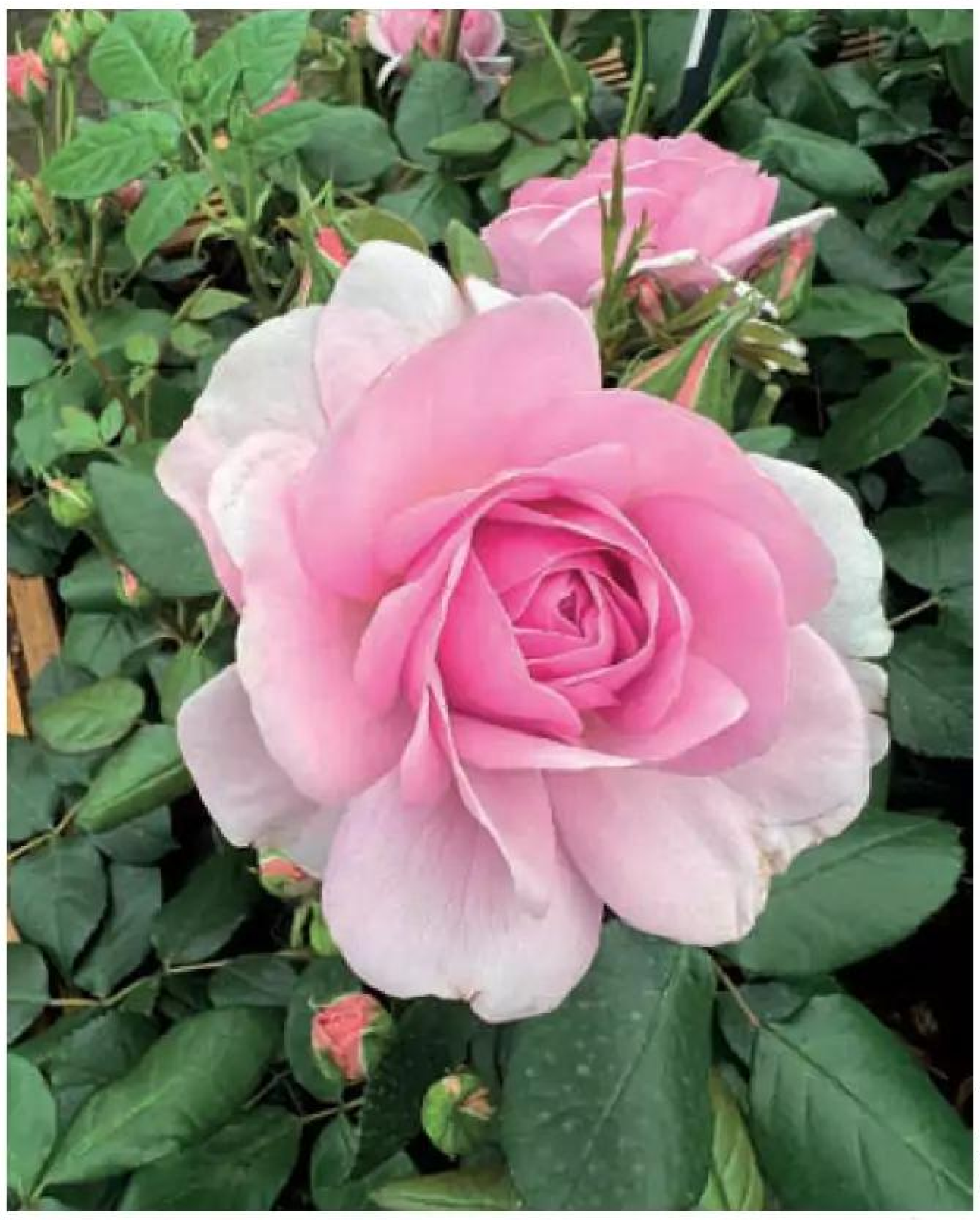
Why do some roses have two names?

The roses we buy for our gardens are usually the result of many years of breeding work and trials. Often companies will have hundreds of new cultivars under development, of which only a few will actually be released for sale. For this reason, successful roses are initially registered with an abbreviation of the name of the breeder and a code word or number, which appears on the label in single quotes. Subsequently a marketing name suitable for the country in which plants will be sold is applied. This marketing name is presented without quote marks.


Amazing apricot with a fruity 'tea' fragrance rose Roald Dahl ® ('Ausowlish')

© Howard Rice for David Austin Roses

Candy-pink blooms and fruity and fabulous perfume of Menopause Charity ('Harblush') rose


© Harkness

How to plant roses

■ Roses can be added to beds and borders as bare roots, arriving between November and March with leafless stems, or from pots, with compost around their roots.

If opting for the former, soak the roots in water for at least a couple of hours and then plant them in prepared soil that's not frozen or waterlogged, or in containers, as soon as possible.

Dig a hole large enough to accommodate the roots, or roots and compost for potted versions, and break up the soil at the base. Manure can be added to increase the availability of nutrients, and the roots sprinkled with mycorrhizal fungi to extend their capacity to absorb moisture.

Aim for the knobbly area between the roots and stems, known as the graft union, to be level with or just below the surface of the soil, before backfilling, firming and watering.

February is a great time to add roses to the garden, with dormant plants being put in place just before the temperature begins to rise.

© Shutterstock

Roald Dahl ® ('Ausowlish')

The soft orange-red buds of this rose open to robust, medium-sized cupped rosettes in a beautiful apricot colour, with a fruity 'tea' fragrance. This rose matures to an attractive rounded and bushy shrub and bears few thorns. The flowers bring to mind Dahl's famous *James and the Giant Peach* story.

Type of rose: English shrub
Height: 90cm (3f)
Spread: 110cm (3 1/2ft)
Charity supported: Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity – £100,000 donated
Rose company: David Austin Roses

Menopause Charity ('Harblush')

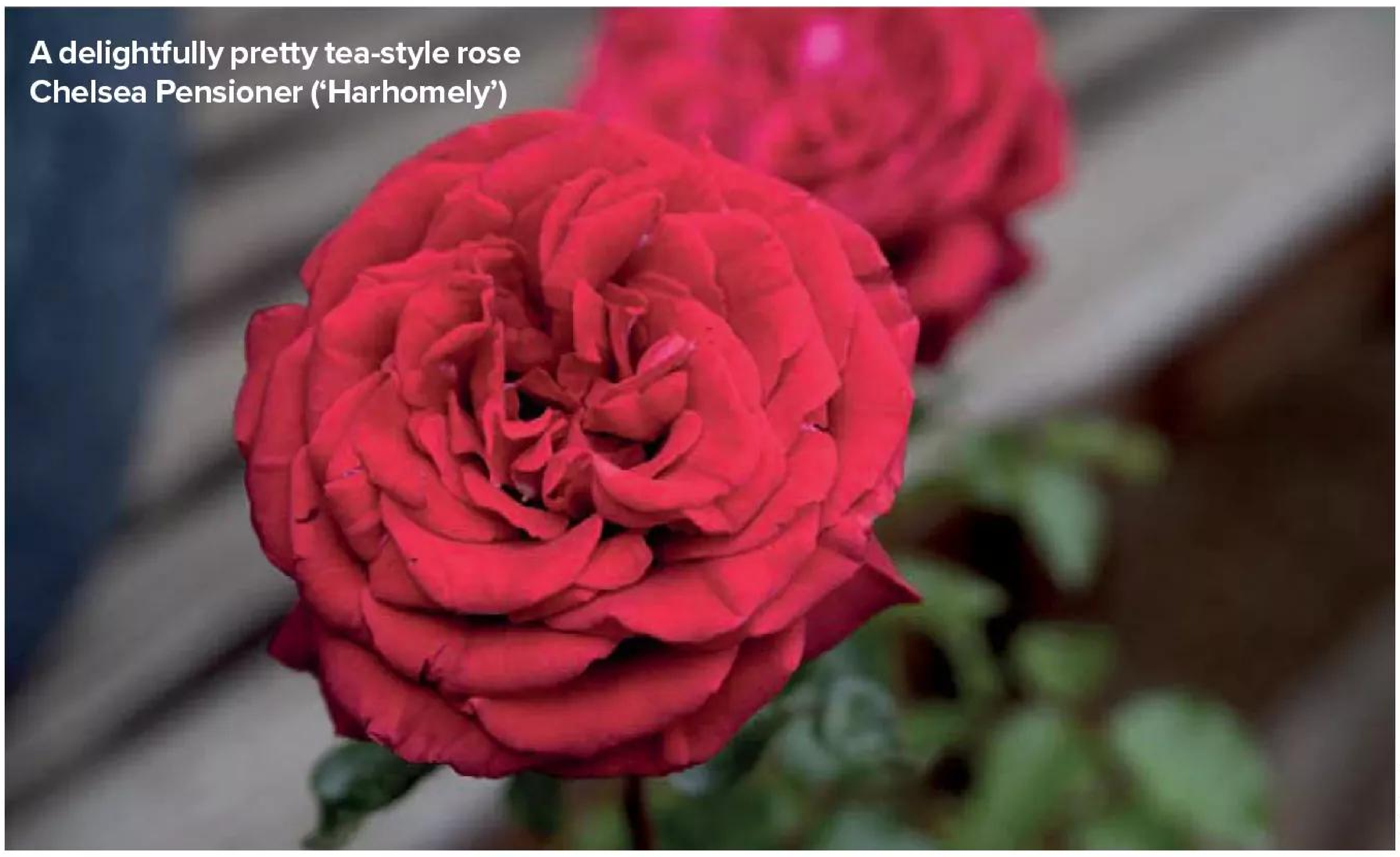
A strong fruity perfume, large candy pink flowers with up to 60 petals and lustrous emerald green foliage make this beautiful floribunda rose a real looker. It produces lovely displays throughout the summer and autumn, with the late colour being more intense, with a richer, deeper tone. This compact, busy rose is great for large pots as well the garden.

Type of rose: Bush
Height: 90cm (3ft)
Spread: 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: The Menopause Charity
Rose company: Harkness

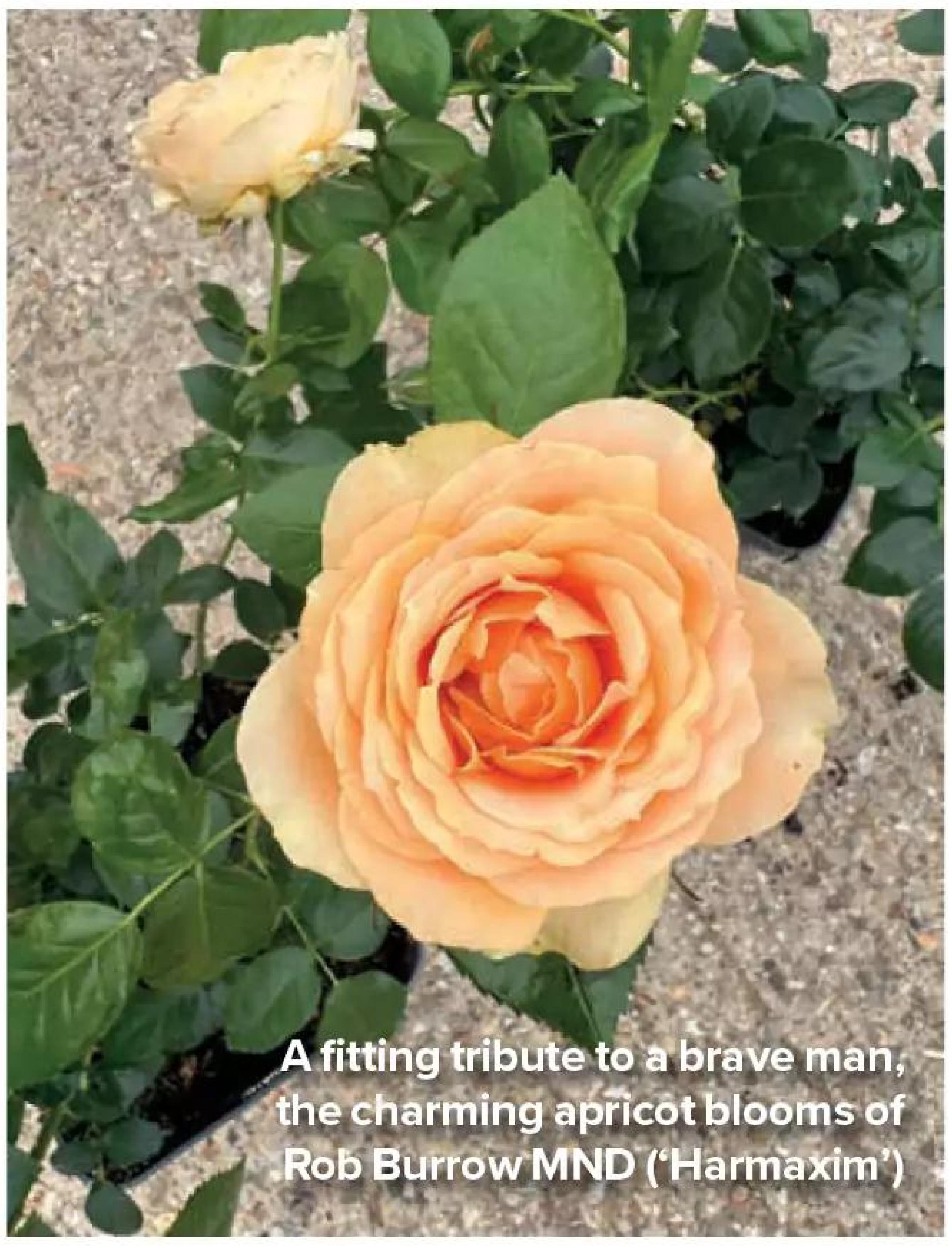
Chelsea Pensioner ('Harhomely')

The rich red flowers of this rose are a great match for the distinctive coats of the famous Chelsea Pensioners. This repeat flowering hybrid tea-style rose has a medium fragrance and dark green foliage. Blooms are resilient in wet and windy conditions. This rose was launched at the 2024 RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Type of rose: Bush rose
Height: 105cm (3.5ft)
Spread: 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: Royal Hospital Chelsea, a home for retired veterans of the British Army
Rose company: Harkness


A delightfully pretty tea-style rose Chelsea Pensioner ('Harhomely')

© Harkness



A fitting tribute to a brave man, the charming apricot blooms of Rob Burrow MND ('Harmaxim')

© Harkness

Memories and Moments ('Harclaim') has a profusion of colours and a delicate scent

© Harkness

Rob Burrow MND ('Harmaxim')
Strong, healthy, reliable and utterly charming: this beautiful repeat-flowering apricot-coloured rose has a strong myrrh fragrance and glossy, dark green foliage. Buds are tinged with light green as they form. Named after the former Leeds Rhino rugby player who lost his battle with Motor Neurone Disease in 2024, the Rob Burrow MND Rose is a fitting tribute to a brave man.
Type of rose: Bush
Height: 90cm (3f)
Spread: 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: Motor Neurone Disease
Rose company: Harkness

A resilient repeat-flowerer with apricot blooms Alfred Robert Boe ('Harxanthiaum')

© Harkness

Memories and Moments ('Harclaim')
This new Persica rose flowers abundantly over many months. It has a profusion of blooms in shades of lilac, with attractive petals, a purple eye, yellow stamens and a delicate fragrance. It can be grown in a border or large pot and is friendly to wildlife
Type of rose: Shrub
Height: Up to 75cm (2.6ft)
Spread: Up to 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: The Willow Trust, which makes precious memories for seriously ill 16 to 40-year-olds.
Rose company: Harkness Roses

Alfred Robert Boe ('Harxanthiaum')
The double flowers of this apricot-blend rose change with the sun. It's a robust repeat-flowerer, able to withstand a range of weather conditions, and has a sweet rose perfume and glossy green leaves. This rose was named after Alfred, the father of singer Alfie Boe. Alfred died of a brain tumour when Alfie was 23.
Type of rose: Bush
Height: 90cm (3ft)
Spread: 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: Brain Tumour Research
Rose company: Harkness

Dr Susan Michaelis ('Harbelieve')
Former airline pilot Dr Susan Michaelis set up the 'Lobular Moon Shot Project' to raise awareness of invasive Lobular Breast Cancer, with which she was diagnosed in 2013. The repeat-flowering rose bearing her name is a classic hybrid tea, which blooms with more than 40 unfurling petals of deep cerise pink, with flecks of silvery white, and has a medium fragrance.
Type of rose: Hybrid tea bush
Height: 105cm (3.5ft)
Spread: 60cm (2ft)
Charity supported: Lobular Moon Shot Project
Rose company: Harkness

A repeat-flowerer with lovely cerise-pink petals Dr Susan Michaelis ('Harbelieve')

© Harkness

Suppliers

Blue Diamond Garden Centres:
www.bluediamond.gg

Fryer's Roses:
www.fryersroses.co.uk

Harkness Roses:
www.roses.co.uk

David Austin Roses:
www.davidaustinroses.co.uk

Some of the companies selling charity roses

Harkness Roses

■ Harkness Roses has produced several roses that help raise money for good causes, often with £2.50 from each sale being donated. Each is the result of seven or eight years of breeding work at the company's nursery in Hitchin.

Harkness's charity roses have led to some unforgettable moments for its team, such as when they joined forces with Rob Burrow's family to plant a rose named in his honour in his garden, while he watched on. "We often partner with charities to raise money for a range of good causes," says Philip Harkness. " Many of our charity roses are named after people.

"Producing charity roses is part of our belief and ethos that it's good to give back to the community."

Alfred Robert Boe Harxanthiaum rose

© Harkness Charity roses

Blue Diamond and Fryer's Roses

■ Blue Diamond Garden Centres donates £1, or in some cases, a percentage of the retail selling price, for every one of the charity roses sold online through its own brand Fryer's Roses, or its retail outlets.

Every year the company seeks to add one or two new ones to its collection and works with breeders, such as the German company Rosen Tantau, to find suitable candidates. "We've been supporting various charities for a number of years," explains Blue Diamond Group Relationship Manager Jill Kerr.

"It takes a long time to develop and trial roses and we work with renowned breeders to find the perfect roses. We then get UK exclusivity on new releases and launch them on behalf of the charities at high profile events.

"It's difficult for charities to get funding and this is a way for Blue Diamond Garden Centres to not only donate to the respective charities but, and perhaps more importantly, to help raise valuable awareness of the work of the charities at horticultural events and through our garden centres, social media channels and in mailers to our Diamond Club members."

Such is the appeal of the fundraising roses that Fryer's receives a number of requests from charities every year and has created an online application system to help with the selection process.

David Austin

■ David Austin Roses has raised thousands of pounds for several charities by linking them with new roses. The company's biggest successes include two apricot-coloured and repeat-flowering English shrub roses: Roald Dahl® ('Auowlish'), which raised £100,000 for Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity after its release in 2016, and the 2023 introduction Dannahue® ('Ausa6b15'), named in honour of Danny Clarke, known as The Black Gardener, which brought in £10,000 for Grow2Know.

In 2021, David Austin Roses released Nye Bevan ('Auspital') and marked the occasion by planting five plants in the new sensory garden at Bedwelty House in Tredegar, home of Bevan's political career, while another 21 were donated to hospices around the country in partnership with the National Garden Scheme. By the end of 2021, sales of Nye Bevan, The Generous Gardener and Princess Alexandra of Kent resulted in a donation of £60,000 to NHS Charities Together and the Alexandra Rose Charity.

"We take many charities into consideration, but typically they fall in line with our BLOOM focus – a charity that is for community, our planet or gardeners of today and tomorrow," says Paul Constantine from David Austin Roses.

Gardeners shouldn't really need an excuse to add a new rose to their borders, but for those looking to justify an extra purchase, opting for plants that raise money for charity is the perfect way to share the love.

THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Spinach, sage and the use of stone as a mulch around crops

Anne has a spring in her step with planting for green leaves and Mediterranean herb gardens

Keep picking spinach even as it attempts to bolt throughout spring. Here Anne is picking the cultivar 'Reddy'.

Gardens, hedges and woods tremble with the creamy tails of hazel catkins, while the snowdrops are, slowly but surely, revealing their pearldrop flowers. The birds are singing their hearts out too, as they stake out their feeding territories and think about nesting; a reminder that any cutting into dense hedges or thickets must be completed soon.

We're lucky to have a population of song thrushes, as theirs is the most significant and complex tune. My mare, Raffle, is starting to shed her winter coat and I'll collect the hair to bring home and shake out so birds can weave a soft nest lining for their eggs and chicks.

Early sowings continue with hardy peas and broad beans and I'm ordering seeds of true spinach for sowing towards the end of February. This leafy veg likes our moist, fertile soil and grows best in cool conditions but is prone to bolting (running up to flower and seed) if sown too early or made to grow during heatwaves. You can almost see chilly or overheated plants squirming in the soil, desperate to seed and get it all over with.

True spinach is an annual, whereas the leafy beets (perpetual spinach and chards) are short-lived perennials. When the beets bolt, cutting out the flower spike can help them settle and grow more leaves. With true spinach, flowering ends the story.

Last summer my woody 15-year-old sage plant gave up the ghost, but had done well for a Mediterranean herb growing on clay soil in a damp climate. There is a lot to love about sage, not just for the tang of its aromatic leaves but the beauty of purple flowers opening in summer against blue-green foliage.

These plants act like magnets to day-flying hummingbird hawk moths visiting our shores from Southern Europe and North Africa. I have plans afoot to replant plenty of sage this year.

How to grow... spinach

Quick-growing true spinach (*Spinacea oleracea*) has a different texture and subtle flavour compared with the leafy beets and responds well to many different treatments. Gardeners tend to evolve their own personal timetable of sowing, planting and harvesting throughout the year and for me, one sowing in late February works well, though another to a cold frame in late summer would be perfect. In colder regions, leave your first sowing until March or April. For this early sowing, I usually sow under glass into modules for planting 15cm (6in) apart, with the intention of cropping small leaves for salads initially and then larger ones for cooking. You can use up a lot of spinach in soups, curries, quiches and filo pastry pies filled with ricotta or feta cheese, pine nuts, egg and a gentle grating of nutmeg.

As the weather warms up, direct sowings tend to be more successful, to drills 30cm (12in) apart. I don't bother with summer sowings but if you insist, choose a lightly shaded bed and keep them well-watered.

Spinach is full of nutrients and many growers hope to maintain a steady supply of small, fresh leaves by making regular sowings two to three weeks apart throughout the year. To do this, sow thinly and evenly in rows only 8-10cm (3-4in) apart to deliver short-lived cut-and-come-again plants. This suits raised beds, wide pots or lengths of guttering.

We always end up with plastic sweetie 'tins' after Christmas and with holes in the base these make ideal cut and come again growing containers. Windowsill sowings can carry on into winter given good light. Harvest with scissors and although there might be a second cutting, fresh repeat sowings work best. When choosing spinach, note that some have flat leaves while others are puckered. Look for cold tolerance and resistance to bolting in the description.

The lovely nutrient-rich leaves of true spinach

All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

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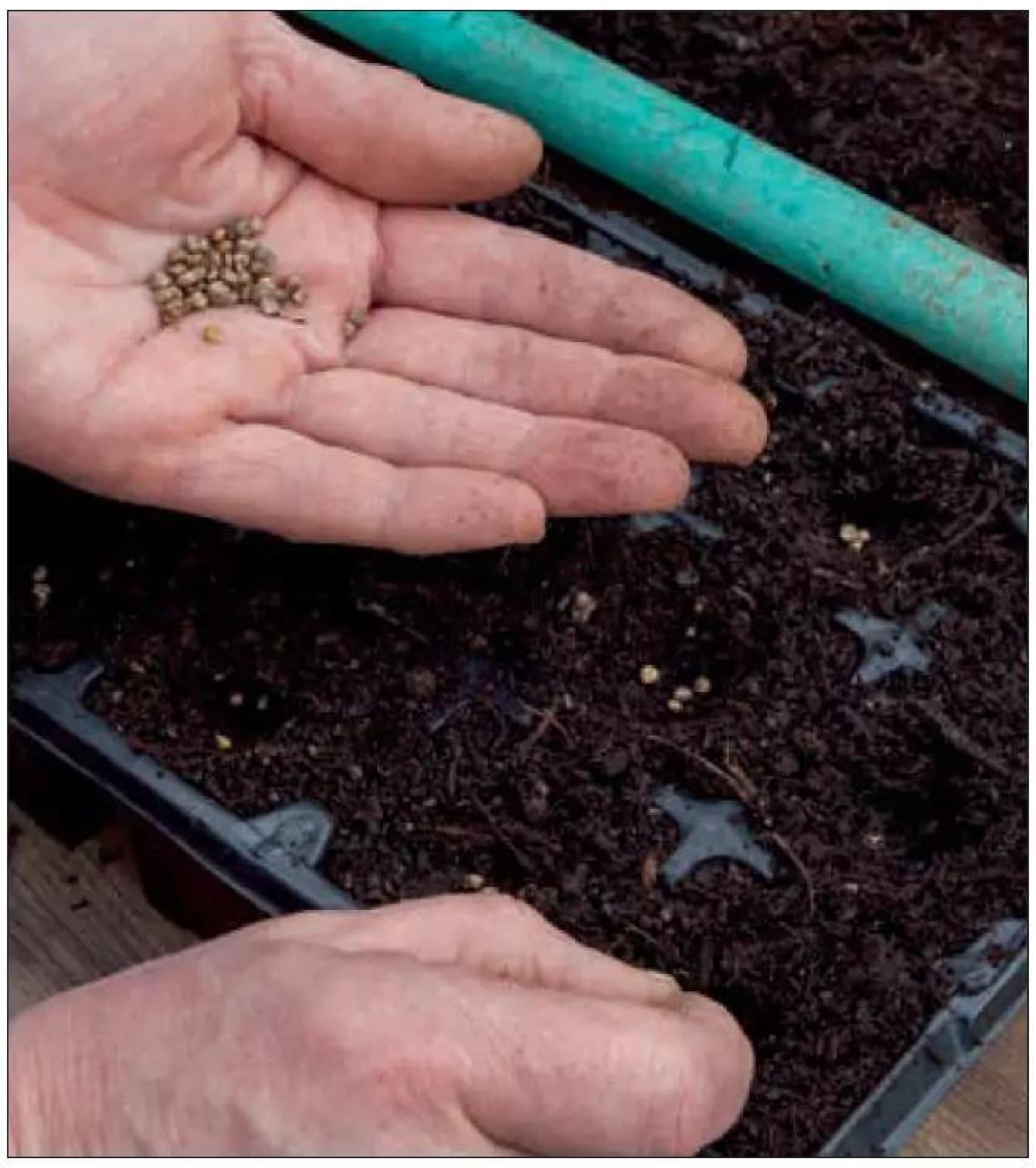
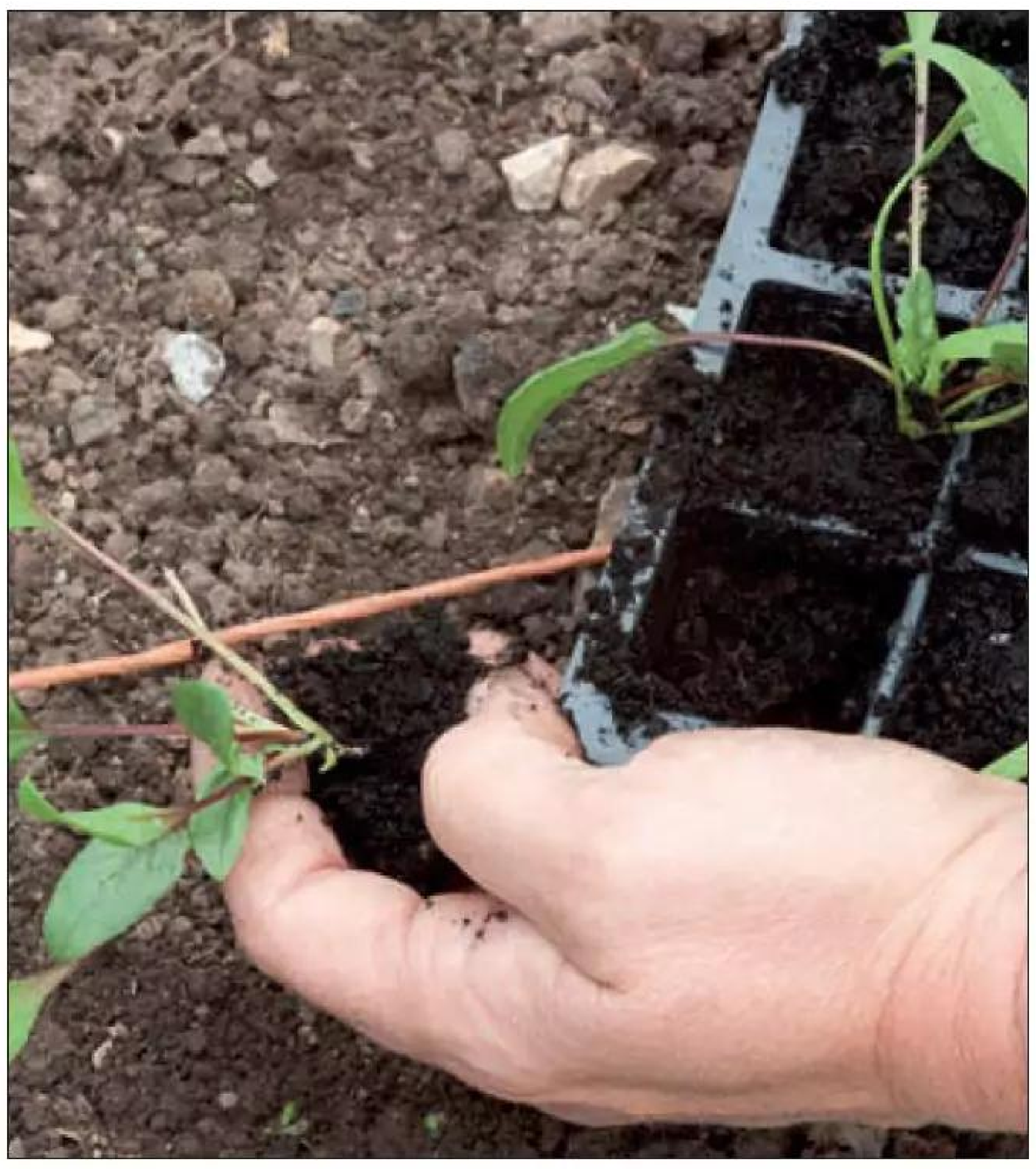
Step by step How to sow and grow spinach

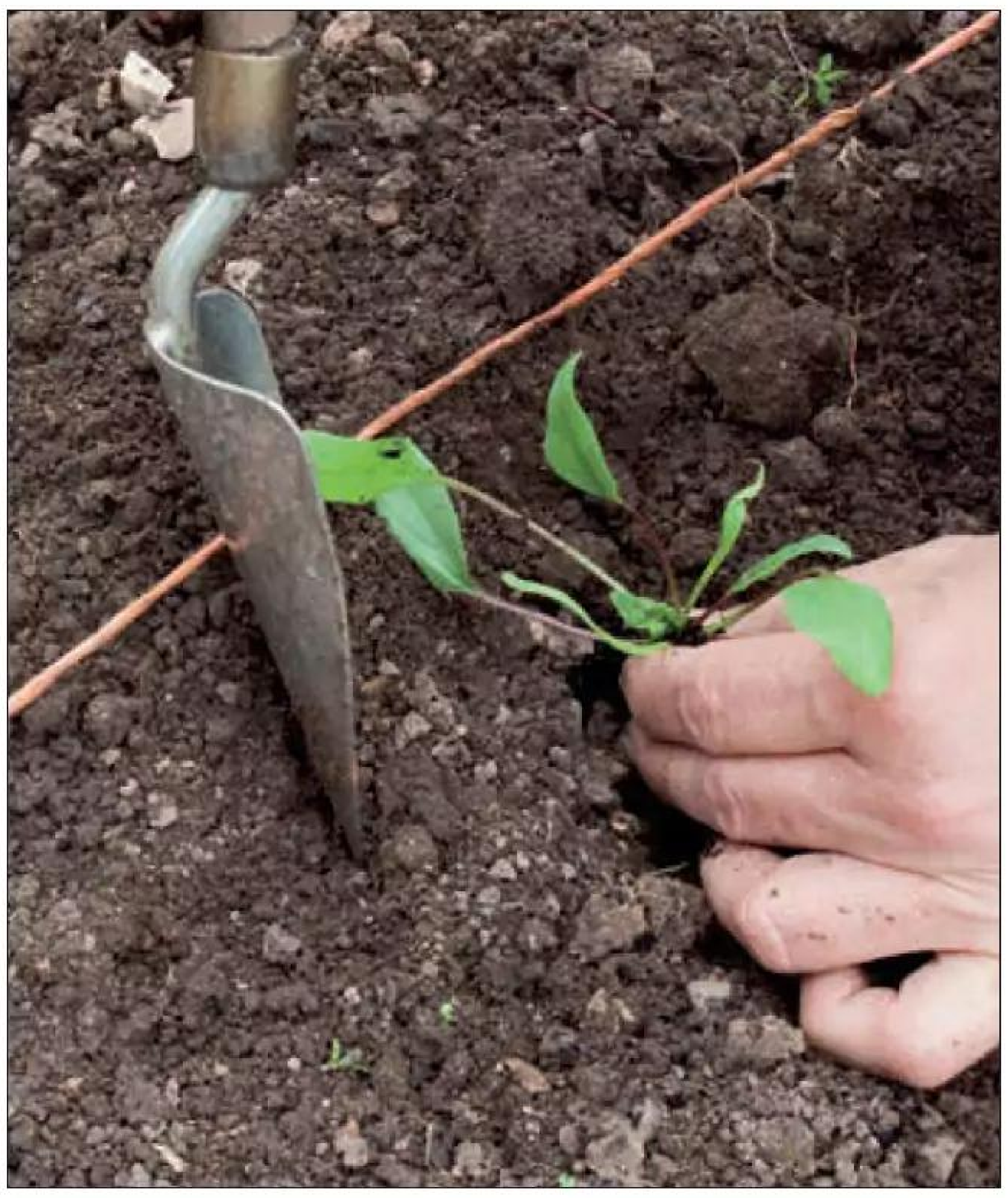


1 If seed is plentiful, sow several per module to maximise propagation space. Seedlings can then be thinned out and planted on.

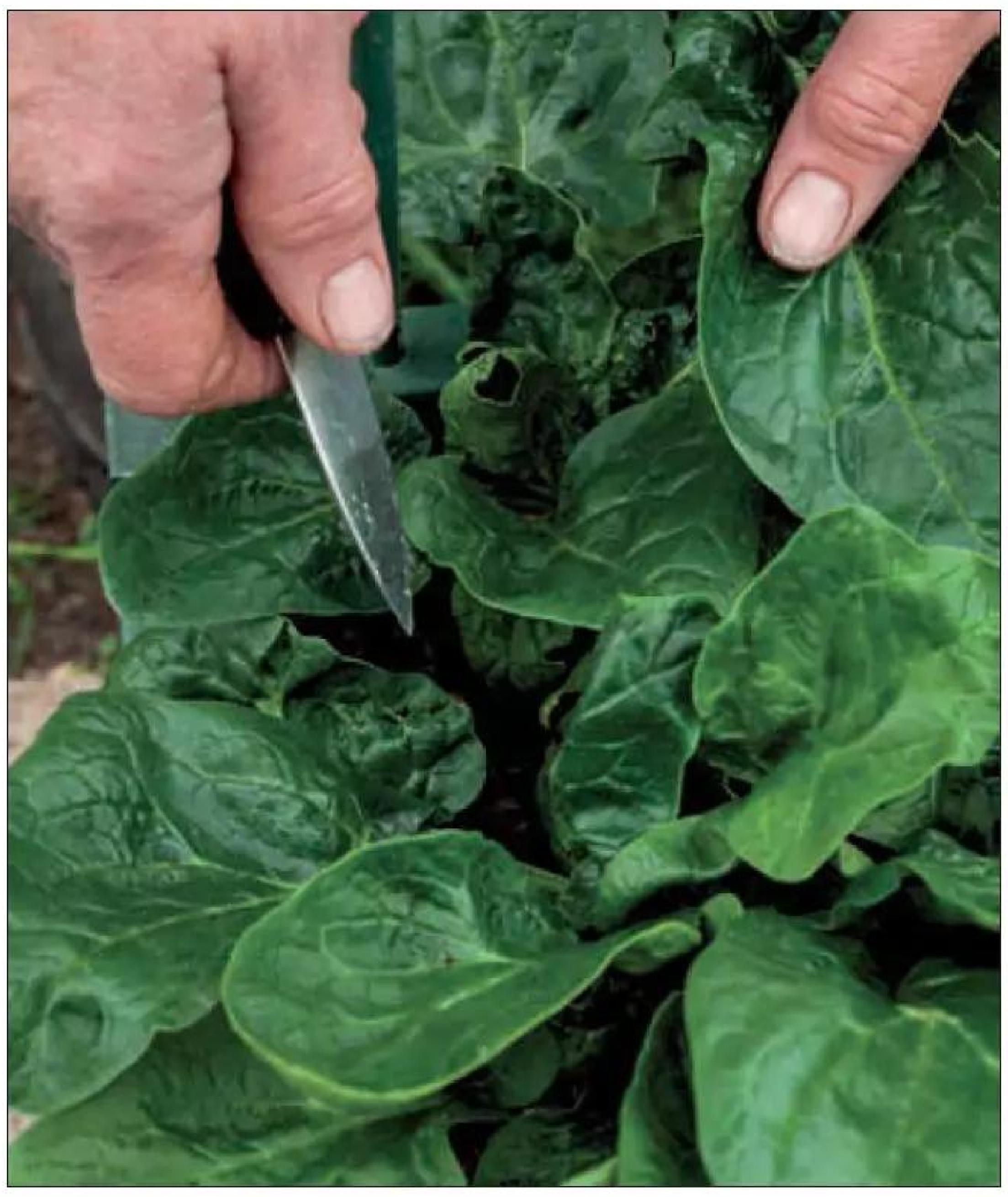
2 When the soil has warmed up and dried out in spring, you can make direct sowings of spinach. Soak the drills if soil is dry.



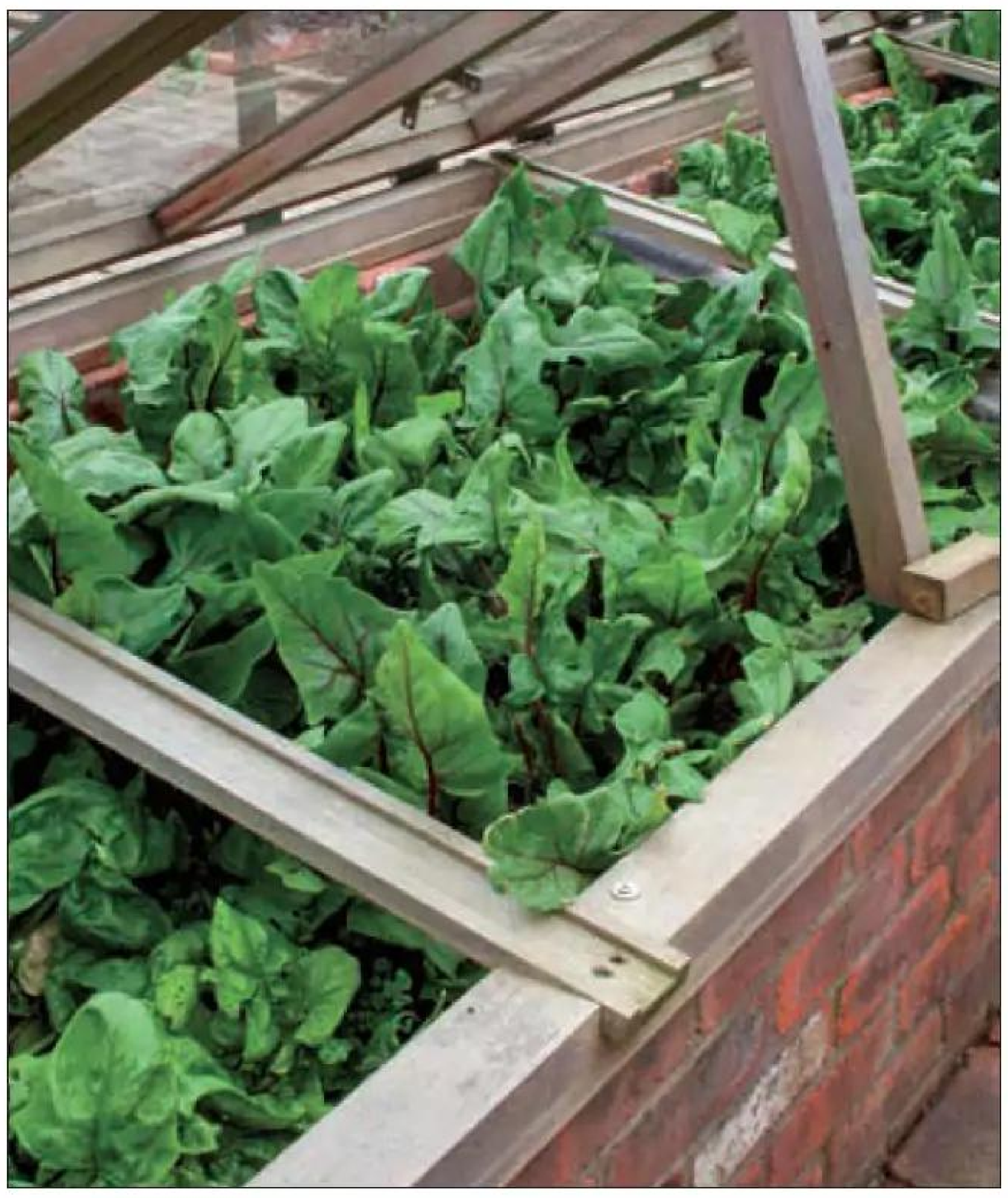
3 Young plants ready for setting out 15cm (6in) apart when they are large enough to handle without damaging them.



4 Firm young spinach plants carefully and water in using a sprinkler on the can.



5 Spinach is harvested by the leaf from the outside or, if there is plenty, cut the whole rosette.



6 Autumn-sown spinach 'Bordeaux' reaches spring maturity in the safety of a cold frame.

Try these... Tasty spinach varieties

'Butterflay'
This green-leaved spinach is a good all-rounder with a reputation for fast-growing and reliable production from spring and autumn sowings. The round to oval leaves are great both as baby leaf and at full size. *www.tamarorganics.co.uk*

'Renegade'
Popular for small, sweet-tasting dark green salad leaves held on short stems, this F1 spinach variety is fast-growing, high-yielding and attractive with good bolt resistance and over-wintering qualities. *www.moreveg.co.uk*

'Rubino'
An attractive spinach whose puckered leaves are red-veined ready to brighten up any salad. Harvest them as cut and come again by taking whole small rosettes, or grow at wider spacings for full-sized plants with a height and spread of 30cm (12in). *www.mr-fothergills.co.uk*

Some years ago we enjoyed a fine display of sage and other Mediterranean herbs in the kitchen garden and I'm looking to recreate this with more planting

A rooted purple sage cutting is potted up

Sage advice

Sage green is a unique blend of blue, green, silver and grey. It does well as a paint or fabric colour but is best enjoyed on the plant itself, *Salvia officinalis*.

Some years ago, I went mad with Mediterranean herbs and the whole kitchen garden erupted into soft hues and mouthwatering aromas from sage, lavender and thyme set along pathways. They were attractive, useful and alive with pollinating insects.

To recreate this, I need large numbers and the cheapest and easiest method is by sowing seeds in spring or early summer when the weather has warmed up. Sow thinly and evenly across a wide shallow pot or tray and transplant seedlings to individual pots.

These youngsters will be best nursed along under unheated glass during winter, where they can shelter from winter wet until ready for planting the following spring or summer.

Sage will prove extremely drought and heat tolerant for those gardening on light, poor soils. Needless to say, they must have full sun. As well as adding chopped sage to cooking, try frying whole sage leaves in butter as a garnish and sprinkling the tasty purple flowers on salads. Clipping plants back after flowering helps keep them compact and avoids woodiness.

Sage will thrive in a container of well-drained soil

Sage flowers contrast well with Californian poppies

Plant sage in groups of three for greater impact

While common sage can be propagated by seeds or cuttings, purple sage is multiplied by cuttings.

Lithic mulches

As a child, I remember being fascinated by an album cover for Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. This depicted the toppled monoliths known as Moai carved by the Rapa Nui people of Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean. Of the many conflicting stories concerning the island, there is visible proof that crops (especially sweet potatoes) were grown successfully from around the 12th century AD by the use of lithic (stone) mulches to create rock gardens.

By then, the volcanic island was largely deforested and the weather altered but by using smaller stones to trap moisture and prevent erosion and larger ones to shield young plants from wind, growers persuaded plants to thrive. Lithic mulch agriculture has a long history and with climate change, could be a useful tool.

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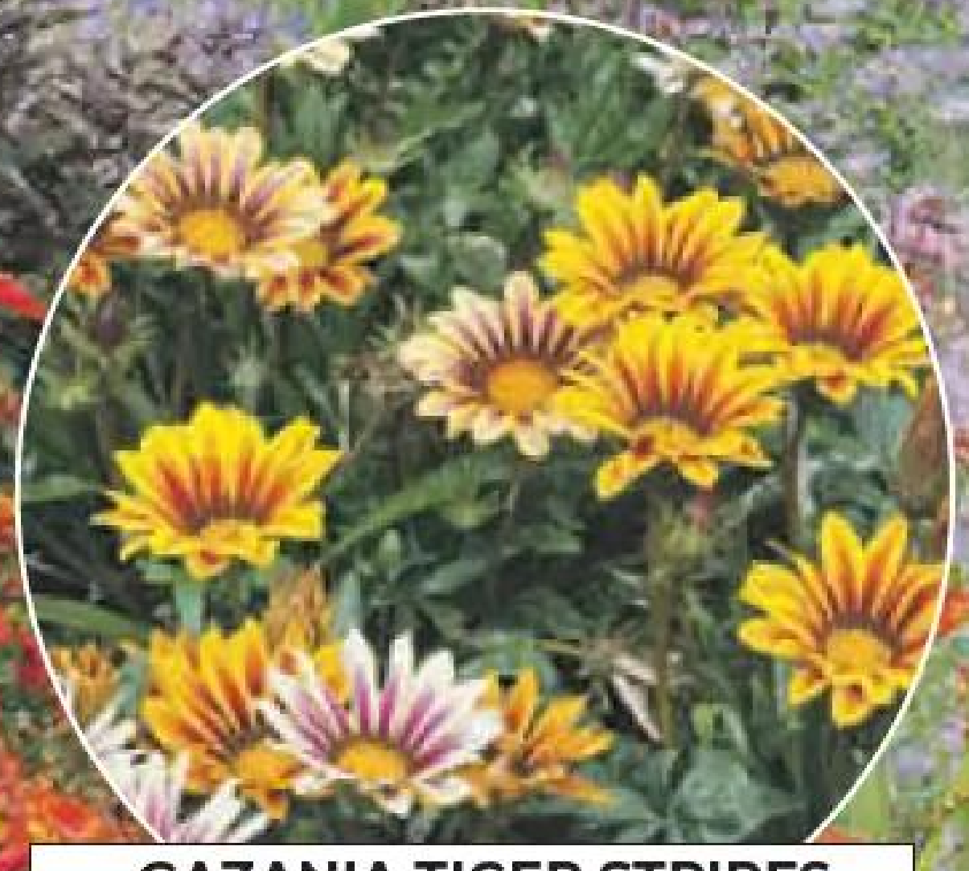
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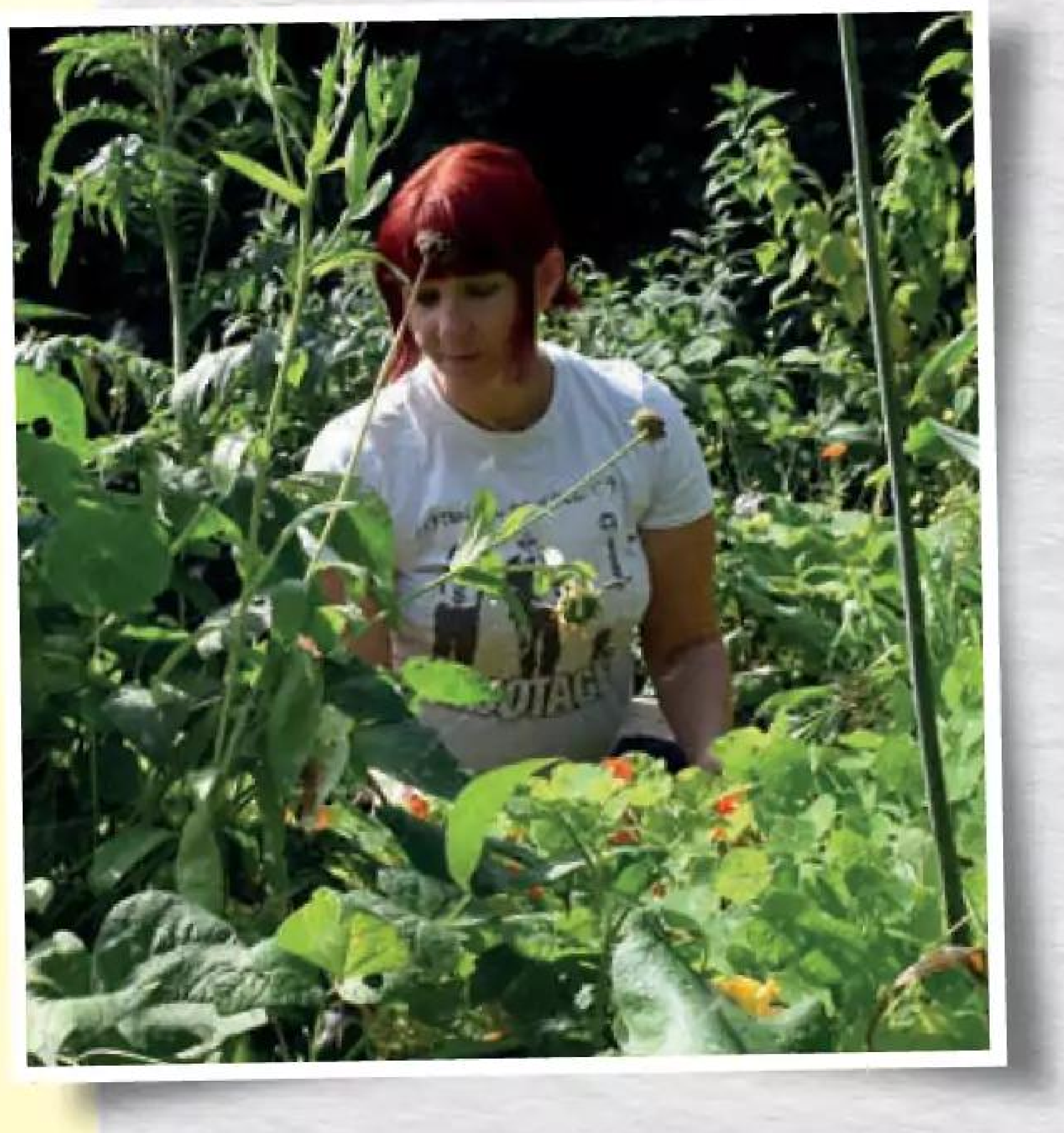

Our award-winning editor, Kim Stoddart, explains why a subscription to Amateur Gardening makes sense:

Since our re-launch in 2023, AG has gone from strength to strength. Readers tell us how much they appreciate its mix of practical advice, money saving tips, regular features and respected columnists (including Bob Flowerdew, John Negus, Ruth Hayes and Anne Swithinbank) who supply expert gardening guidance in every issue. Readers also enjoy our focus on future-thinking and ecologically sound methods of gardening.

Subscribing to the magazine means you'll never miss an issue, plus you'll save significantly on the shop price. So why not take advantage of this special offer and make AG your 2025 constant gardening companion?"

Happy gardening,

Kim x

P.S. we were proud to be winners at the recent Garden Media Guild Awards!

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Mike shares his ideas for clever coast-styleplanting

14 best plants for a seaside-themed garden

Coastal gardens are amongst the most resilient of spaces, **Mike Palmer** explains how to recreate this look

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

O*h I do like to be beside the seaside* go the lyrics of the popular music hall song written in 1907 by John H. Glover-Kind. I'm lucky enough to consider myself a seaside dweller: I live just a mile away from the award-winning, golden sands of Bournemouth beach, and close enough to have to carefully consider what plants I can grow here.

They must be able to withstand the salt-laden winds that toy playfully with them in my garden, and to establish themselves in my sandy and stony, free-draining soil.

As a gardener, I've designed many seaside-themed spaces, so allow me to share my top tips on what makes a great seaside garden, and, importantly, which plants will give you the look and thrive here.

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Above: The Himalayan birch is an ideal resilient tree for a seaside garden, adding structure and colour

Coastal gardens are among the most resilient of green spaces. At times they bear the brunt of the weather when howling winds blow in from stormy seas, ripping through our gardens, unloading scorching salt and coarse sand onto the precious horticultural cargo in our pots and borders.

How coastal plants are able to thrive

Seaside plants need to be resilient and sturdy, possessing characteristics that allow them to tolerate the extremes of beachside weather. Tough, leathery or wax-coated foliage and fine, rolled up needles, or foliage with minute, sometimes microscopic, hairs afford plants the perfect

The New Zealand cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*) is a popular beach-front tree

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protection from the vagaries of coastal weather extremes.

Or, they might be plants that lie low, hugging the ground and allowing the weather to blow right over them. A plant's root system may also be adapted to allow them to penetrate free-draining soils, sending taproots deep down to anchor them and source moisture.

As gardeners, we can help alleviate the meteorological extremities of a coastal location. I'd strongly recommend planting a strategically placed shelter belt of wind-tolerant trees and shrubs, including Leyland cypress, thuja, hawthorn, griselinia and holly to provide extra protection, acting as a green baffle, dispersing strong winds and minimising damage in our gardens.

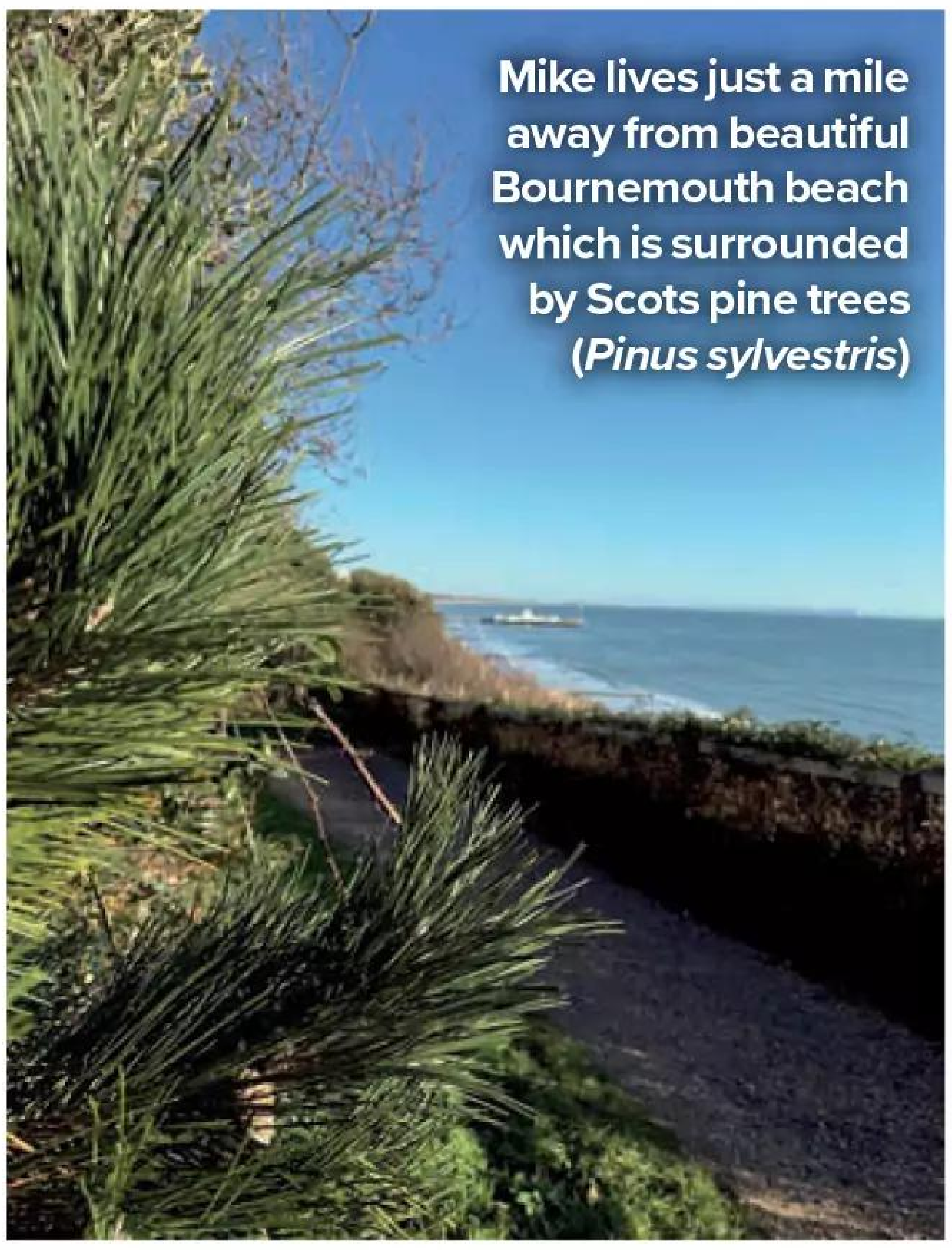
When it comes to planting, here are some of my seaside specials:

Trees

Himalayan birch (*Betula utilis* subsp. *jacquemontii*)
This is an ideal candidate for a beachside garden, providing year-round interest with its ghostly white bark and delicate green foliage throughout spring and summer, turning a soft butter-yellow in autumn.

Growing to a height and spread of 8x4m (26x13ft) in 20 years, this hardy tree will make the perfect nautical focal point.

Cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*)
From the Himalayas we move to New Zealand, from where hails this tree, another seaside stunner. This time an evergreen palm-like tree which, when mature, forms a strong stem from which erupts a fountain of strappy foliage in shades of green, dark red or purple; some with yellow, pink or white stripes.



Mike lives just a mile away from beautiful Bournemouth beach which is surrounded by Scots pine trees (*Pinus sylvestris*)

In summer large sprays of highly scented, creamy white flowers pervade the garden. It can grow to 5m (16ft) tall.

Shrubs

Californian lilac (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* var. *repens*)
With abundant clusters of compact, cerulean flowers in spring, echoing the hues of a Caribbean sea, and that of Cleethorpes too, on a good day, evergreen Californian lilac (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* var. *repens*) is my 'go-to' seaside shrub, growing to 1m (39in) in height and with a spread of between 2.5 and 4m (8ft and 13ft).

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Above: Clusters of cerulean blue flowers on *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* var. *repens*.

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Above and inset: Rosemary will stand firm against the elements to provide pickings for the kitchen (including all-important roast potatoes)

This variety is prostrate in habit, although upright varieties are equally at home in this setting, but all will benefit from a sheltered location. Evergreen varieties are clothed with glossy, green leaves that sparkle like sunlight on summer waves.

Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*)
Another blue beauty (or purple, or white, if you prefer), with frothy flowers from mid-spring to summer is rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), which will bask quite happily in sun-kissed beach-style borders and containers.

Its foliage, narrow splinters of aromatic, dark green foliage, with silvery, felted undersides, is ideal for adding to numerous delicious dishes; in my kitchen it's just roast potatoes - I'm a gardener, not a cook! Height and spread: 1.2m (3ft).

Other shrubby considerations include lavender, cistus and tamarisk.

▶

The stunning white and purple trumpet flowers of *Agapanthus* 'Twister'

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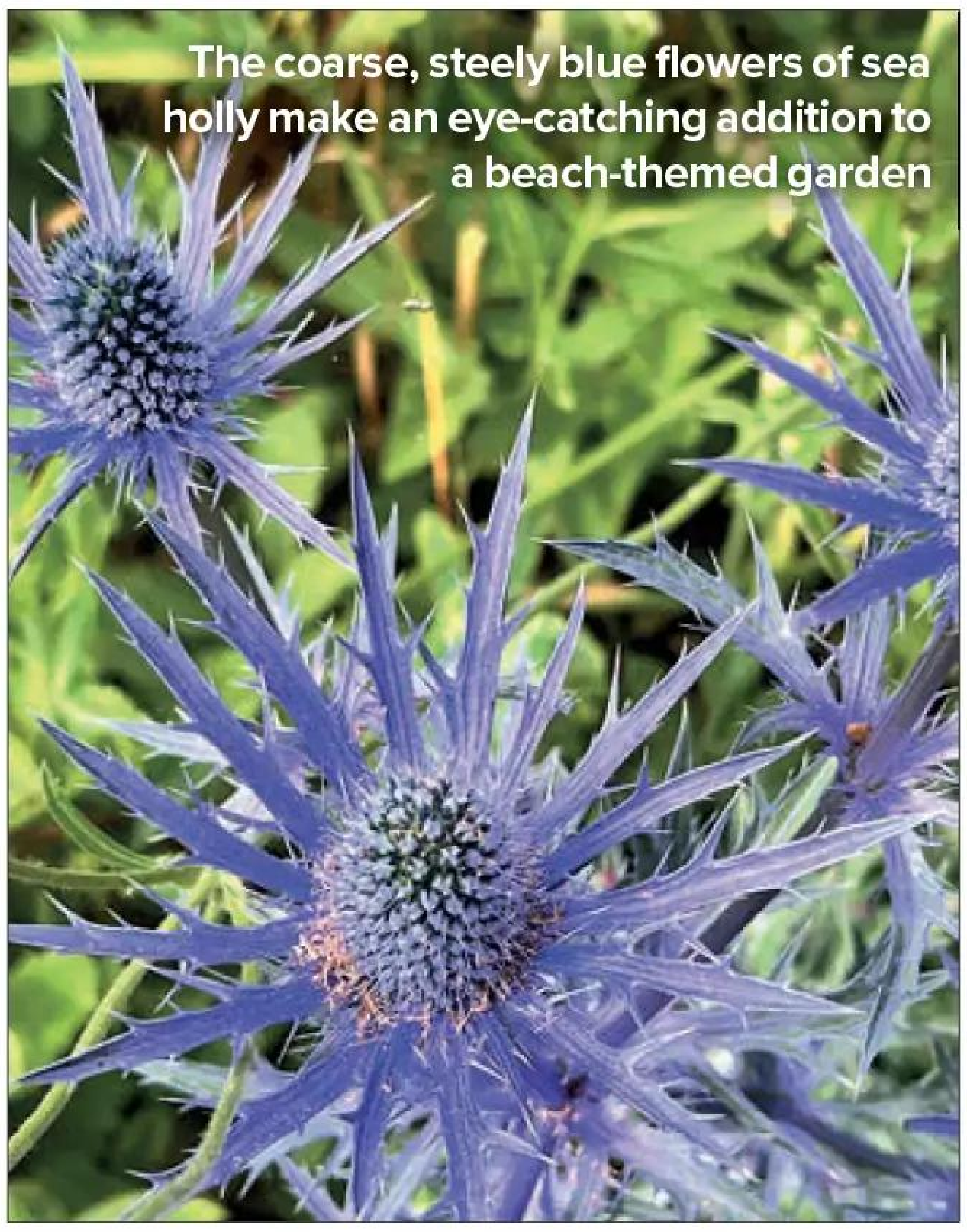

The coarse, steely blue flowers of sea holly make an eye-catching addition to a beach-themed garden

Perennials

Agapanthus africanus 'Twister'

There's a veritable ocean of options when it comes to perennials, but my favourite must be hardy *Agapanthus africanus* 'Twister', (HxS:60x40cm; 23x16in), with its exquisite white trumpet-shaped petals which fade to purple at their stems.

Agapanthus plants thrive in an open, sunny location in a free-draining soil. They come in shades of white, blue, purple and pink. I start feeding my agapanthus with a fortnightly tomato feed in March to ensure prolific blooming.

Crambe maritima

Another perennial which has clearly read our maritime memo is *Crambe maritima*, the second word of its name, or specific epithet, referencing its love of beachside locations, much like myself!

As tough as old diving boots, its blue-grey, curly kale-type foliage sits below clouds of tiny white flowers, reminiscent of the frothy white spume sitting atop the crest of a shore-bound wave. (H:80x60cm; 31x23in)

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Above: *Crambe maritima* as tough as old diving boots, but a pretty addition to a seaside planting

Sea thrift (_Armeria maritima_)

Another maritima, this is a low-growing hummock of fine, green, grass-like foliage that acts as the perfect foil for its tiny soft-pink or white pom-pom flowers that appear on upright wiry stems.

Deadhead its pretty pollen and nectar-rich little flowers to keep them coming and you'll be guaranteed a succession of pollinators to this diminutive beauty (H&S: 40cm; 15in).

Other perfect seaside perennials

We're going to need a bigger beachside garden, but other scintillating seaside perennials include sea holly, such as *Eryngium x zabelii* 'Big Blue'; *Erigeron glaucus* 'Sea Breeze' and *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal'.

Get the look

You needn't be a coastal citizen to aspire to a seaside garden, in much the same way you don't need to be a cottage dweller to plant a cottage-style garden.

Firstly, lay a weed-suppressing geotextile membrane across the area, before planting naturalistic drifts of your favourite seaside selections through it. Then, carefully lay smooth Scottish pebbles, available from all good landscape merchants, around the plants, creating a natural pebble-beach effect by using drifts of large and small pebbles. Remember to buy pebbles from suppliers (as mentioned on pg. 51) to preserve wildlife habitats and the coastal ecosystem. Responsibly sourced driftwood and seashells are readily available from good landscapers or internet auction sites too. You could also be extremely adventurous by planting up a small boat, adding oars and a couple of buoys to complete the look.

© Shutterstock

Right: Bring the beach to your garden with pebbles, rocks, barrels and beach-resilient plants

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The dainty pom-pom flowers of *Armeria maritima* hunker down for protection against seaside storms.

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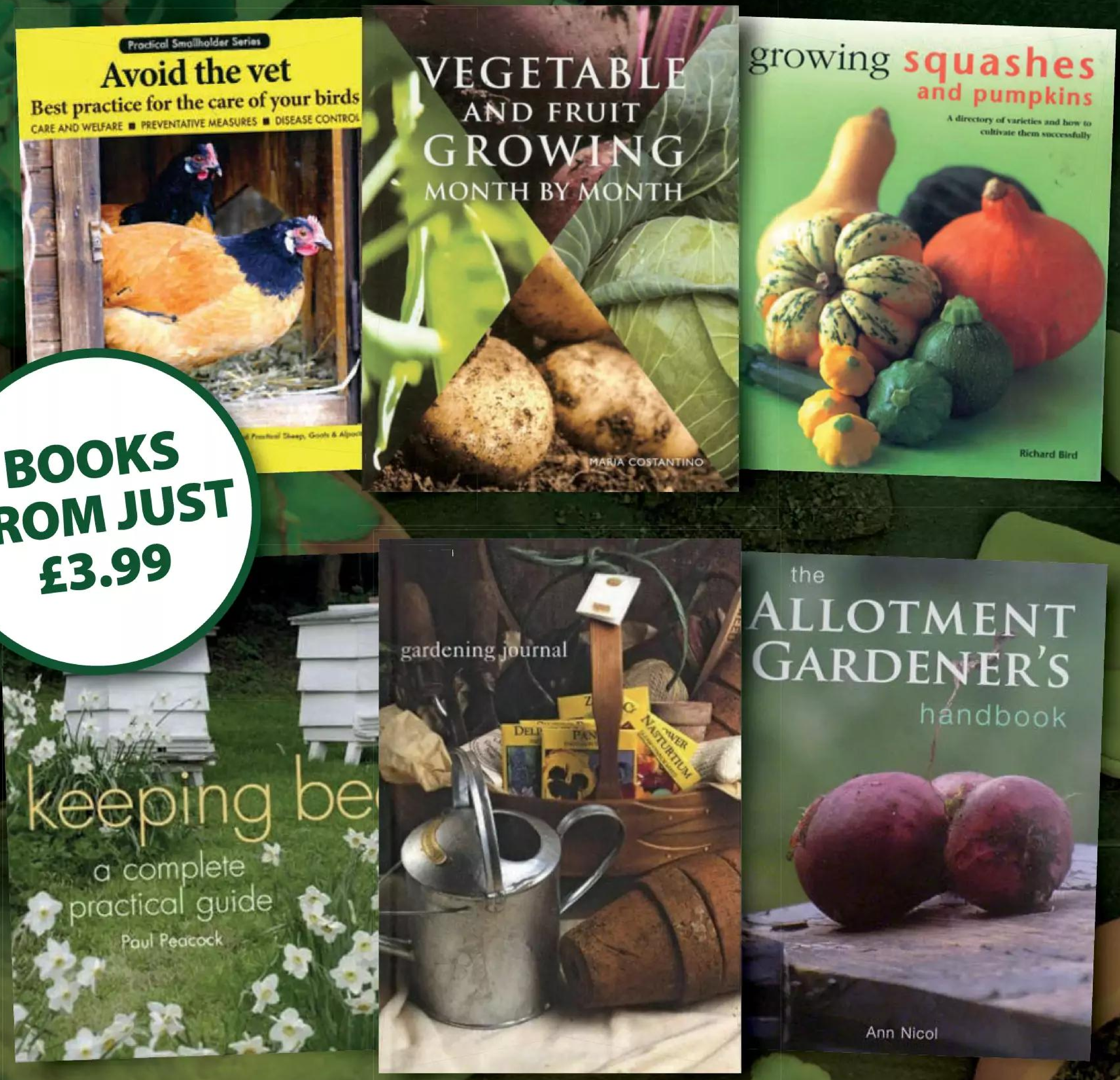
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Rosie's resilient gardening

Colourful upcycling!

How to turn the shabby into show-stopping centre pieces with more practical and creative ideas from **Rosie Irving**

Use primary colours to add unexpected pops of brightness to your garden

In this series I share a host of ideas with you on how to make and upcycle useful and beautiful items for the garden with found and unwanted objects.

As an individual undergoing treatment for cancer, I draw on recent experiences to share with you thoughts on how these projects can benefit our collective well-being and, in the process, encourage us to spend quality time outside in the garden.

Design tips for using colour

Introducing colour into the garden can turn a simple space into a stunning oasis and influence our mood, creating, in the process, a joyful as well as serene space.

Think about how you would like to feel when using your garden; relaxing after a hectic day, or giving yourself an energy boost if feeling worn out or a little jaded. In each case, colour can help achieve this.

A basic rule of thumb is that bright colours energise a space and make it feel more inviting, but they also make it feel smaller as they bring things closer by advancing your field of vision. Cooler colours, such as purples and blues, are calming and recede your field of vision, making small spaces feel larger.

Plants are without doubt a wonderful way to introduce colour into the garden, but so too can various garden structures.

Green: Often the most constant colour in a garden, it is fresh, restful and calming. It brings with it a sense of harmony and 'all's well with the world', possibly because the brain associates green with nature.
Red: Bold, bright and stimulating, generating energy, but needs to be used with care as it can make areas look smaller.
Blue: Cool, calming and relaxing, blue can lower blood pressure, slow your heart rate and calm your mind, in turn reducing anxiety and stress.
Yellow: Lifts spirits and brings positivity, giving the garden a sense of well-being even on a dark day. It's cheerful and welcoming and helps the brain release a chemical called serotonin, said to help overcome depression or anxiety. Be careful though, as yellow can not only tire the eyes due to the amount of light reflected from it, but also dominate a space as it's the first colour the eyes go to, (think of that famous fast food company's yellow arches), so use it carefully in planting schemes and outdoor furniture.
Purple: This colour denotes calmness and if you're stressed it can help soothe the mind.
Pink: Soft, light shades promote tranquillity and peace. Make sure you choose the right shade as too bright a pink could leave you feeling over stimulated.
Orange: This colour has been recognised as a cure for depression since ancient times. It indicates optimism and happiness, overflowing with earthly energy.
White: White is said to help achieve mental clarity, but like black, this is not strictly a colour. It makes a great backdrop to help darker colours look really effective at dusk and to enjoy on summer evenings.
Colour test: If you're unsure what colours to use, paint wood offcuts with sample paints.

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

Rose has exciting plans for this blue bistro table set!

Bright plants such as geums can be used to complement or contrast with upcycled furniture

How to revive faded garden furniture

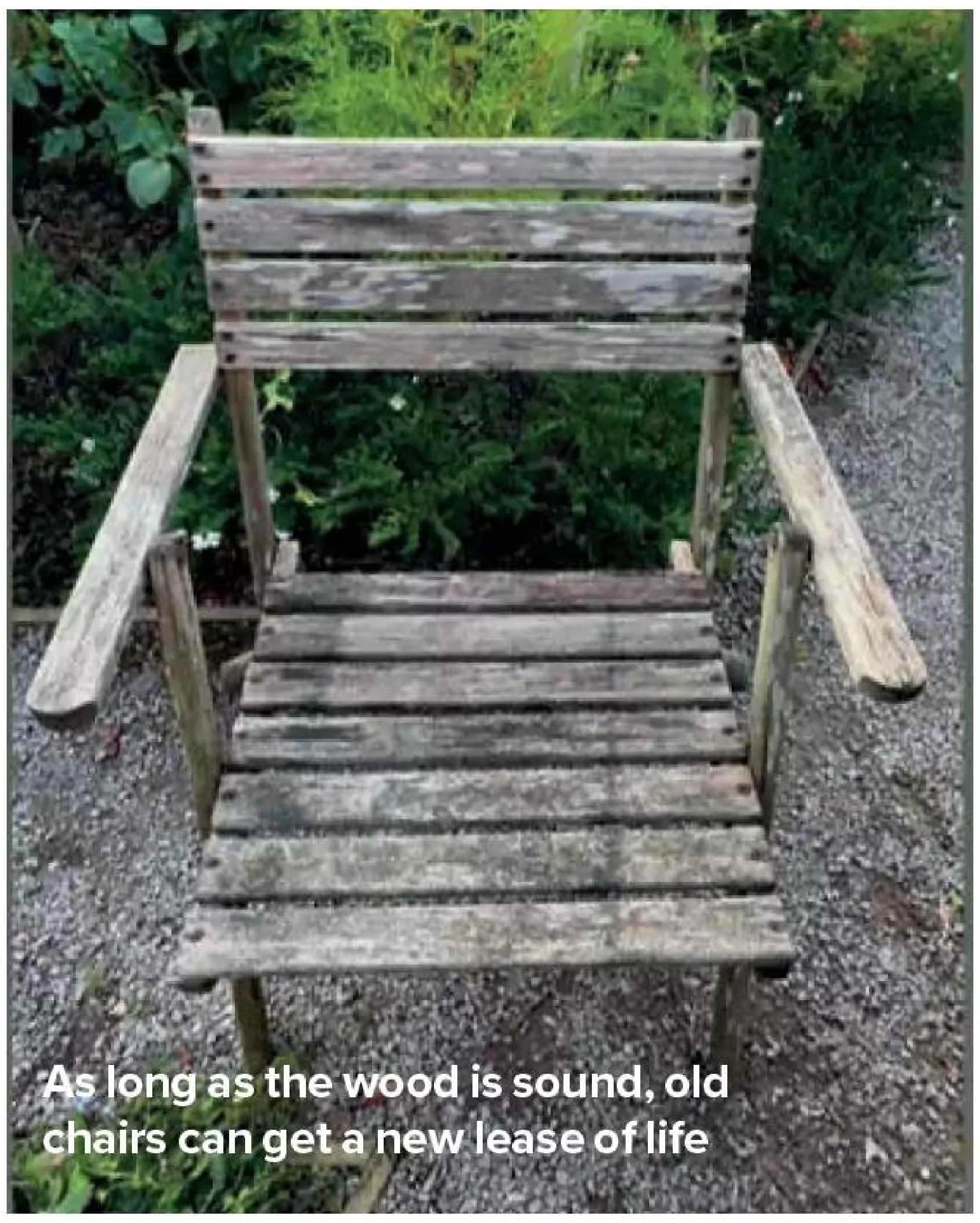
This is the time of year when companies start advertising patio sets and benches for the forthcoming season. If your outdoor furniture is looking jaded, read on before buying anew, as you might be surprised how easy garden furniture can be to rejuvenate and, in the process, feel great about saving money and creating a totally different look and feel to your plot.

Spruce up an old wooden chair and create a focal point

Weathered wooden chairs have rustic charm but often blend into the background. You can turn one into a feature and mood enhancer just by painting it the colour of your choice.

My old wooden chair was originally placed at the end of a path to encourage people to sit on it and admire the garden from a different angle - but nobody did because it wasn't noticed!

So I painted it pink and suddenly that old, forgotten chair became a focal point and is now regularly used.


As long as the wood is sound, old chairs can get a new lease of life

This cheerfully painted pink chair is just begging to be sat on!

Top tips

- Rub down with sandpaper before painting.
- Adding a layer of clear outdoor varnish preserves paint for longer.
- If you think you might change the colour, leave it unvarnished and you will need to refresh the colour at the end of the season.
- Remember that cool colours will make the item seem further away; useful if you want the space to feel larger.

Spray paint metal bistro sets

Change the look and atmosphere of the area by respraying a whole table-and-chair set.

I have a blue metal table bought cheaply in an end-of-season sale but I want this area to be softened and blend with the rest of the garden so I sprayed it purply pink!

How to make it

- Clean the items to be sprayed.
- Wear a mask while spraying.
- Shake the can vigorously and use in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Top tips

- Shake the can at regular intervals while spraying.
- Move your arm holding the can smoothly across the area, keeping the can about 10cm (4in) away from the surface. Holding it too close to the item can result in paint dripping.
- Consider white as it works well in a shady or predominantly green plant area of the garden.
- Consider also experimenting with a textured spray finish such as stone or artisan rust.

Rosie felt the blue colour of the table was a bit harsh, so changed it to purply pink

Wear a protective mask for spraying

Spray painting is quick and relatively easy

Burn a bench...

What you'll need

- Blow torch
- Gas cylinder - propane & butane mix
- Bowl of water
- Water spray bottle
- Safety glasses
- Heatproof gloves
- Oil and brush

This is an exciting way of transforming the look of wooden furniture. You can waterproof and extend the life of the item using my old friend, the blow torch.

This idea was first practised by the Japanese in the 18th century. They call it *Shou sugi ban*, meaning 'burnt cedar'.

It's super quick and super fun and works best with any type of softwood, including pallets.

Avoid blow-torching in summer when everything is bone dry and remember that rotten wood is dangerous to sit on but an essential habitat for small creatures.

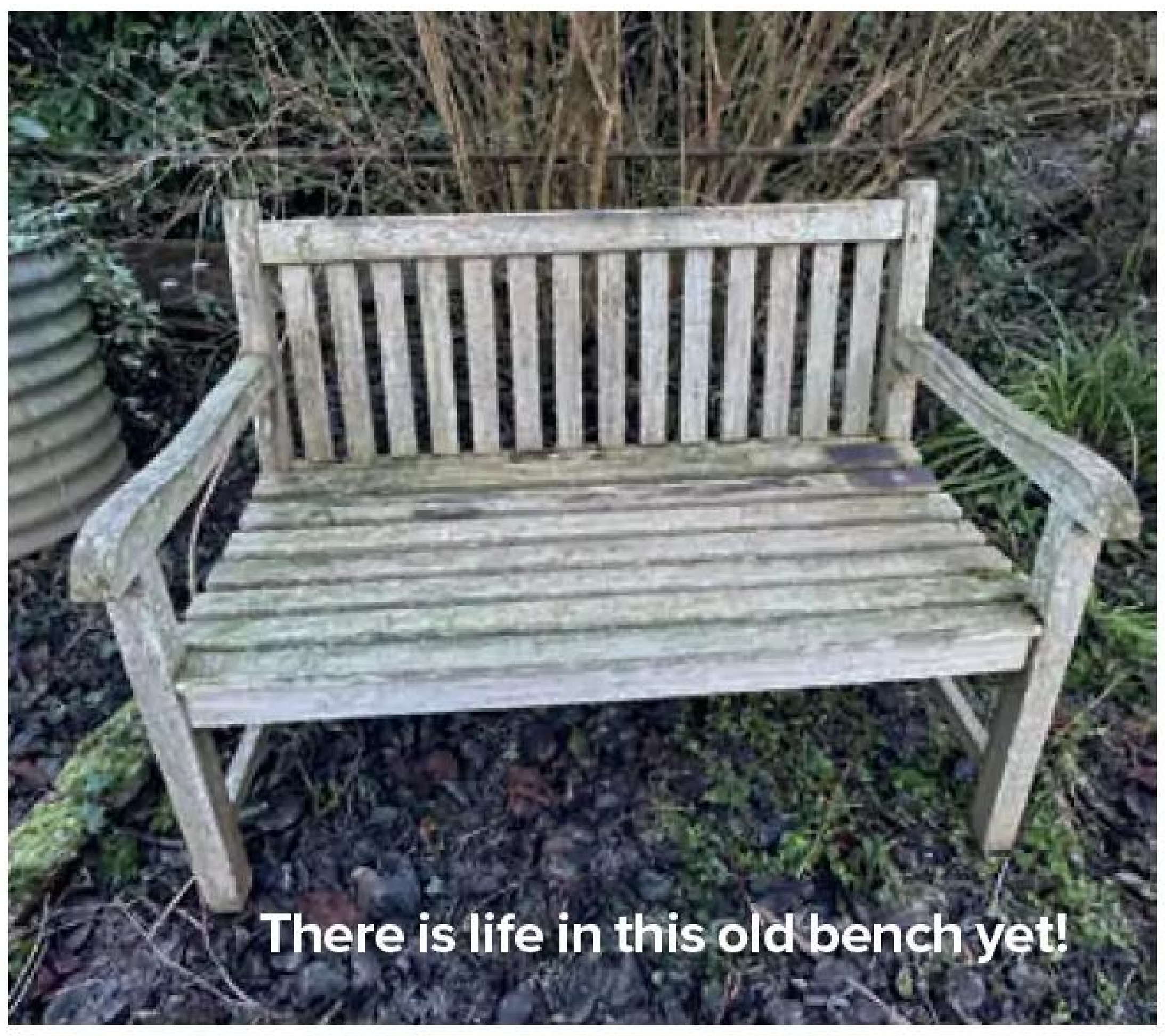
How to make it

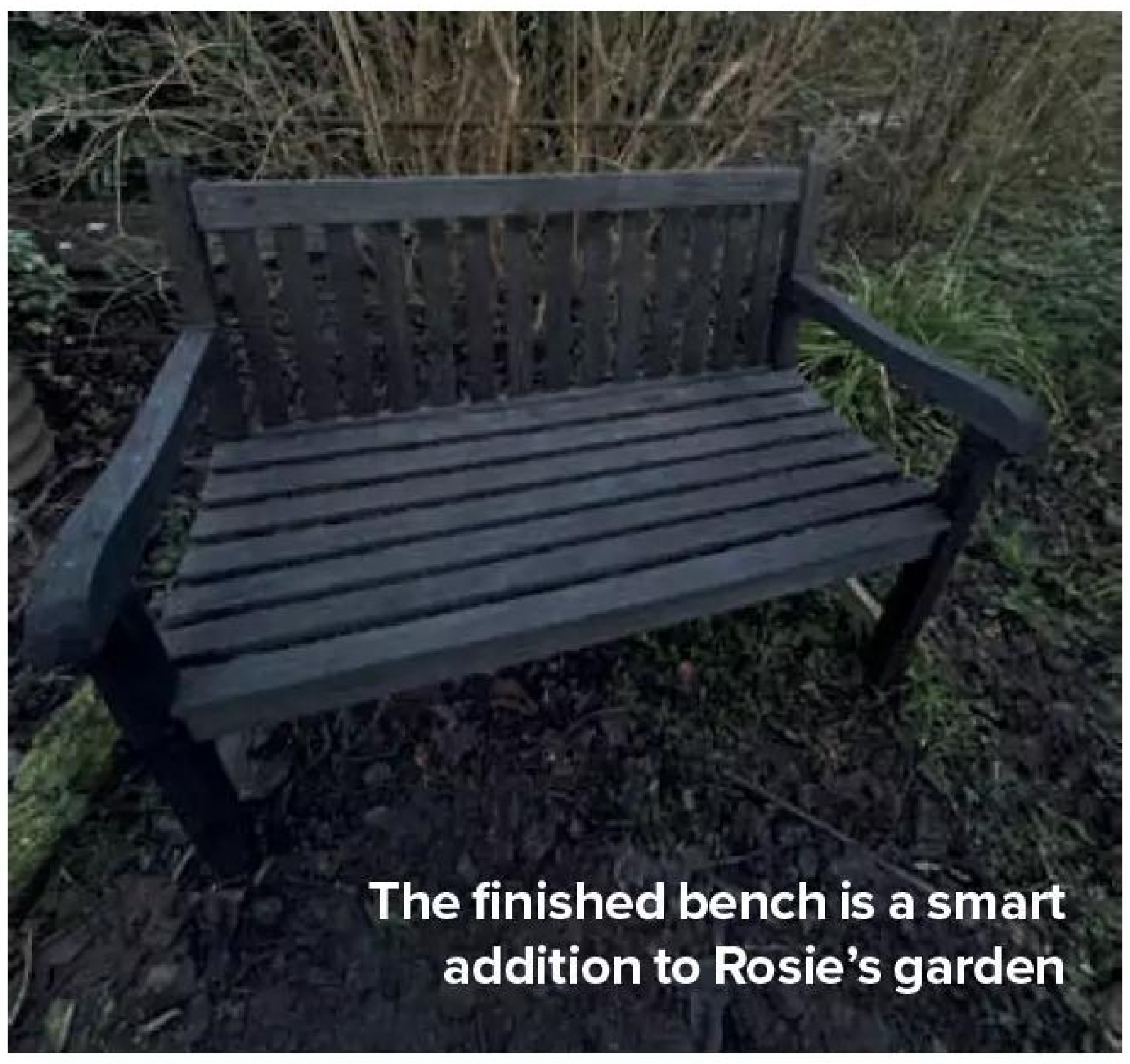
- It really is easy. Just hold the lit blow torch close to the wood so that the blue flame makes contact with it and move the flame smoothly across the wood.
- Lightly spray charred surfaces with water afterwards to cool the wood and help reduce warping. The item can be oiled but this is not necessary

Top tips

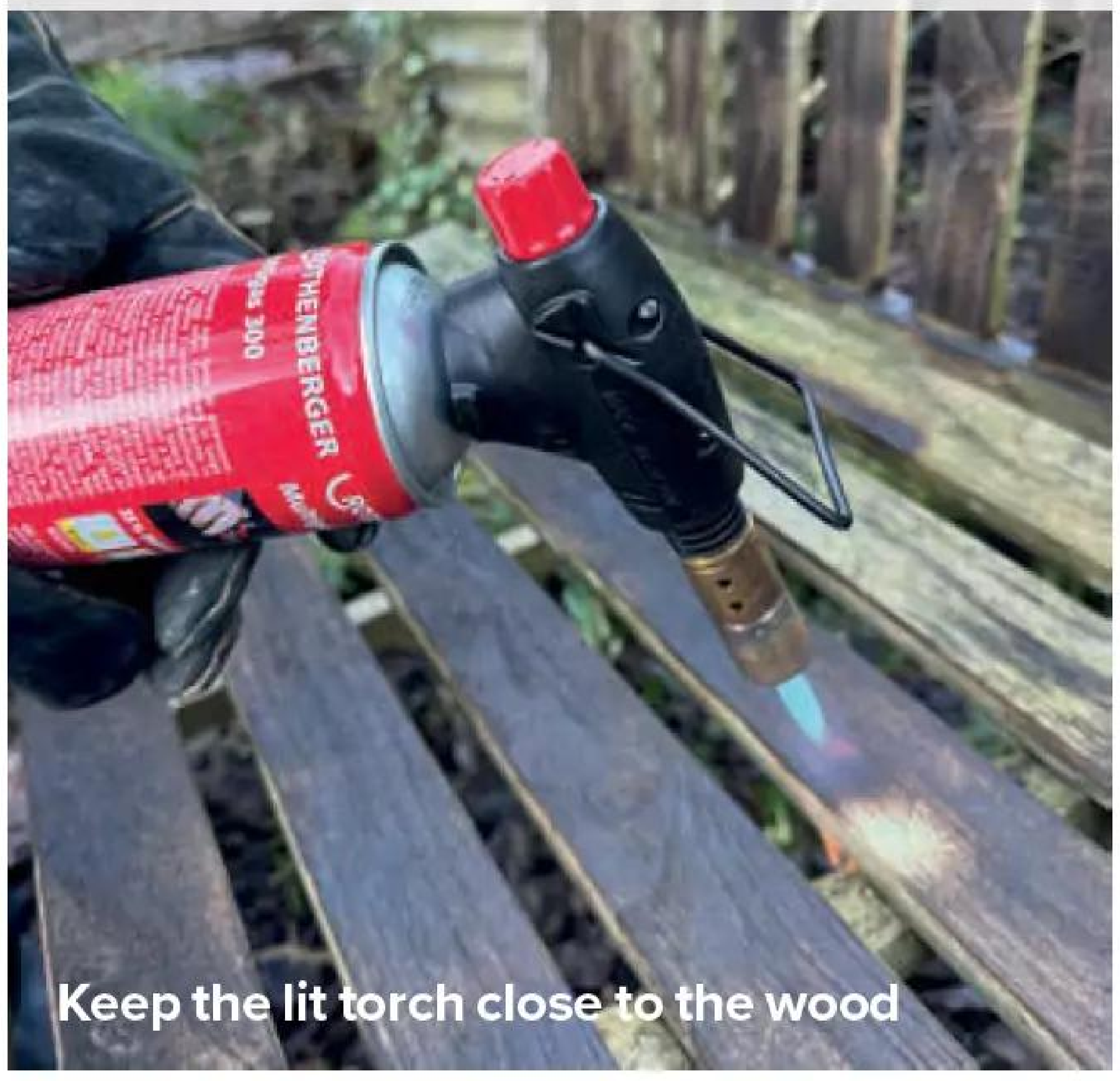
- Choose a sheltered spot away from the house or wooden buildings and do be careful when using a blow torch.
- Experiment with different intensities of charring depending on the look you'd like; lightly toasted to full crackle.
- If the thought of using a blow torch doesn't appeal, try using a product called charred wood accelerator to achieve a similar effect.

Charring wood is an ancient Japanese technique

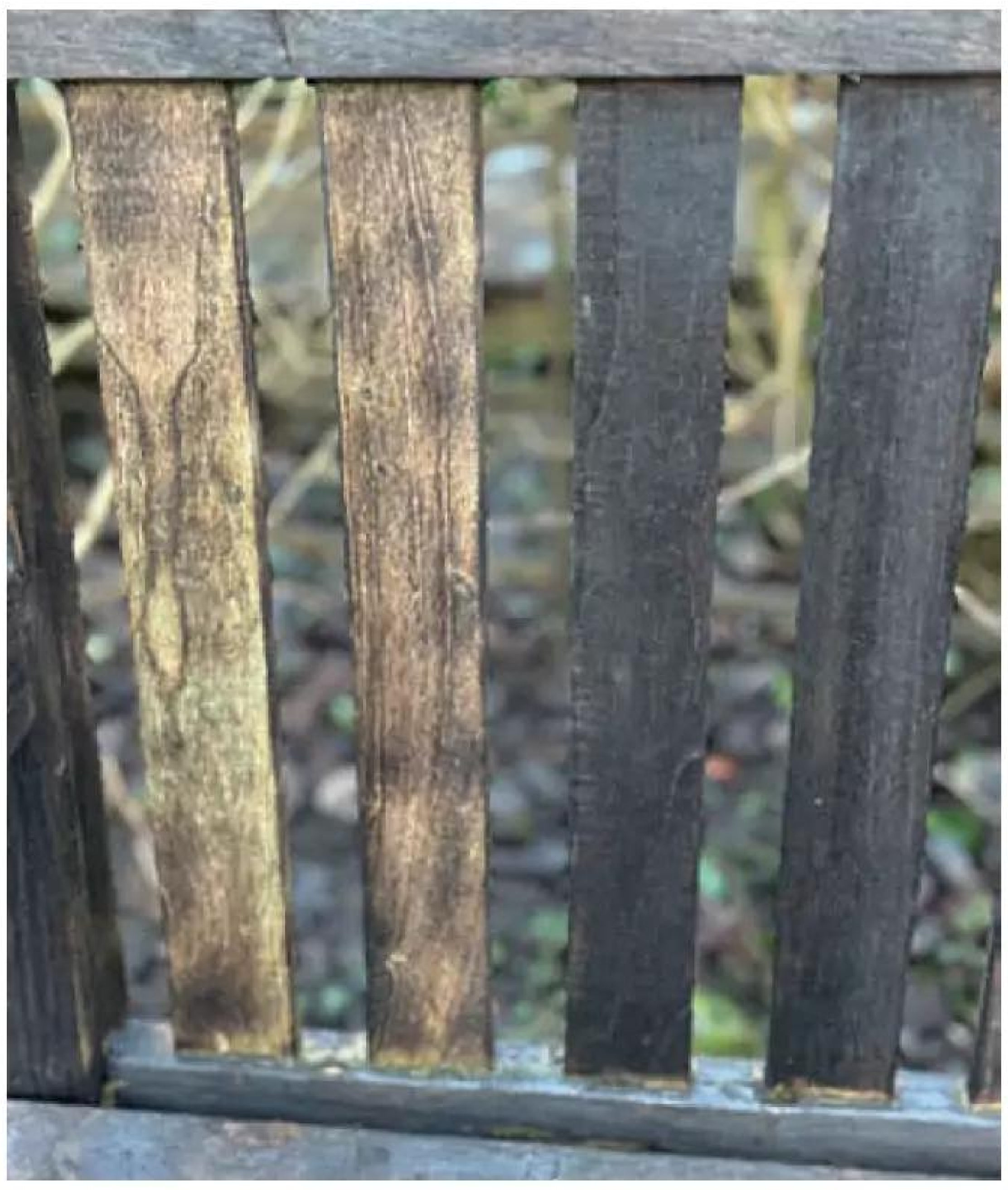

There is life in this old bench yet!


The finished bench is a smart addition to Rosie's garden

Do be careful when using a blowtorch and follow through safety procedures


Keep the lit torch close to the wood

Charring can really accentuate the grain of the wood


Experiment with different levels of charring

Make garden obelisks using painted wood offcuts

Painted wooden offcuts can create interesting garden features

What you'll need

- Narrow wood offcuts
- Twine
- Paint
- Paintbrush

Here's a practical, creative and easy way to bring height to a small space on a budget using narrow painted wood offcuts.

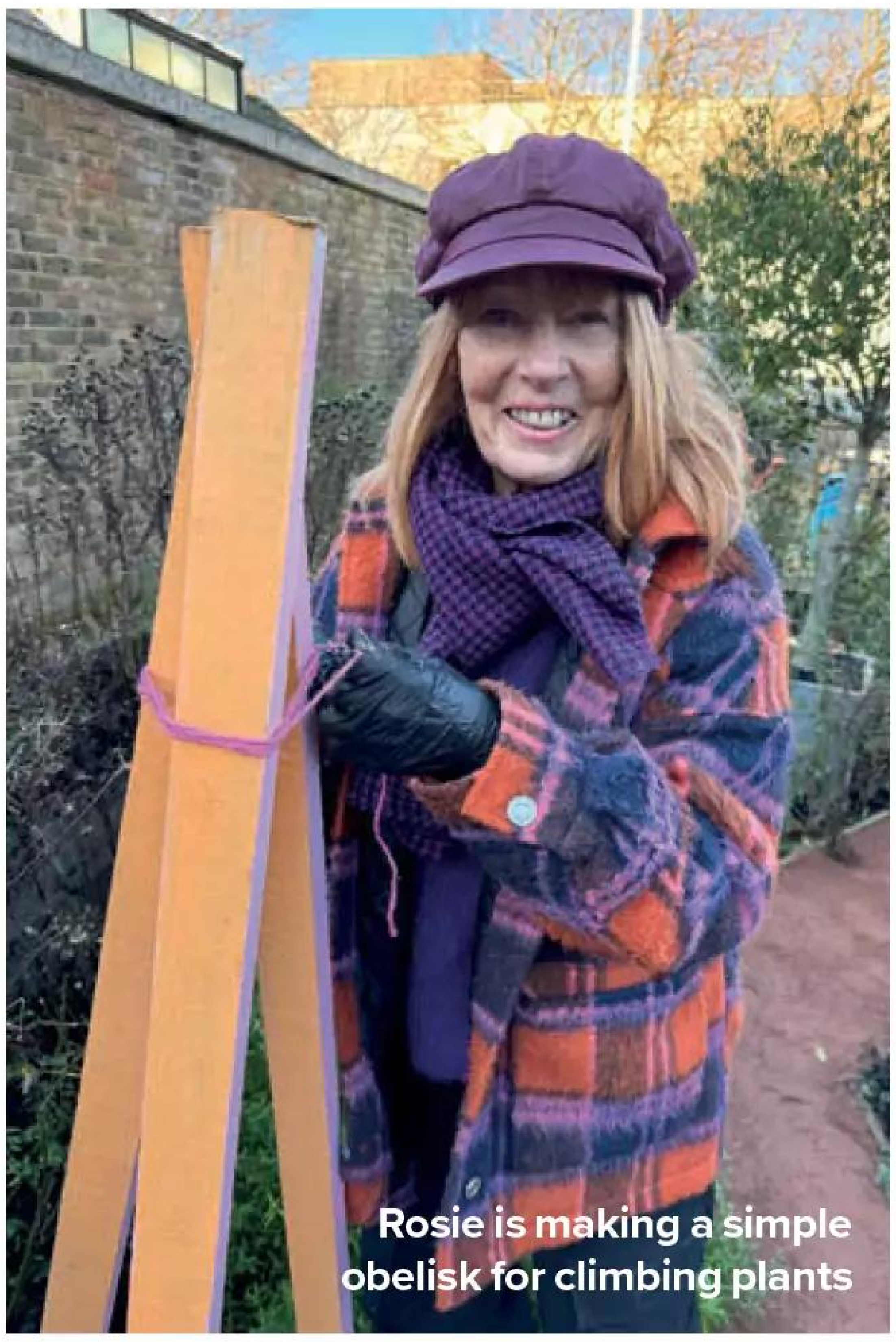
Choose your colour to create the desired effect and/or mood and appropriate backdrop for what you're planning to grow up it, such as sweet peas, runner beans and clematis.

How to make it

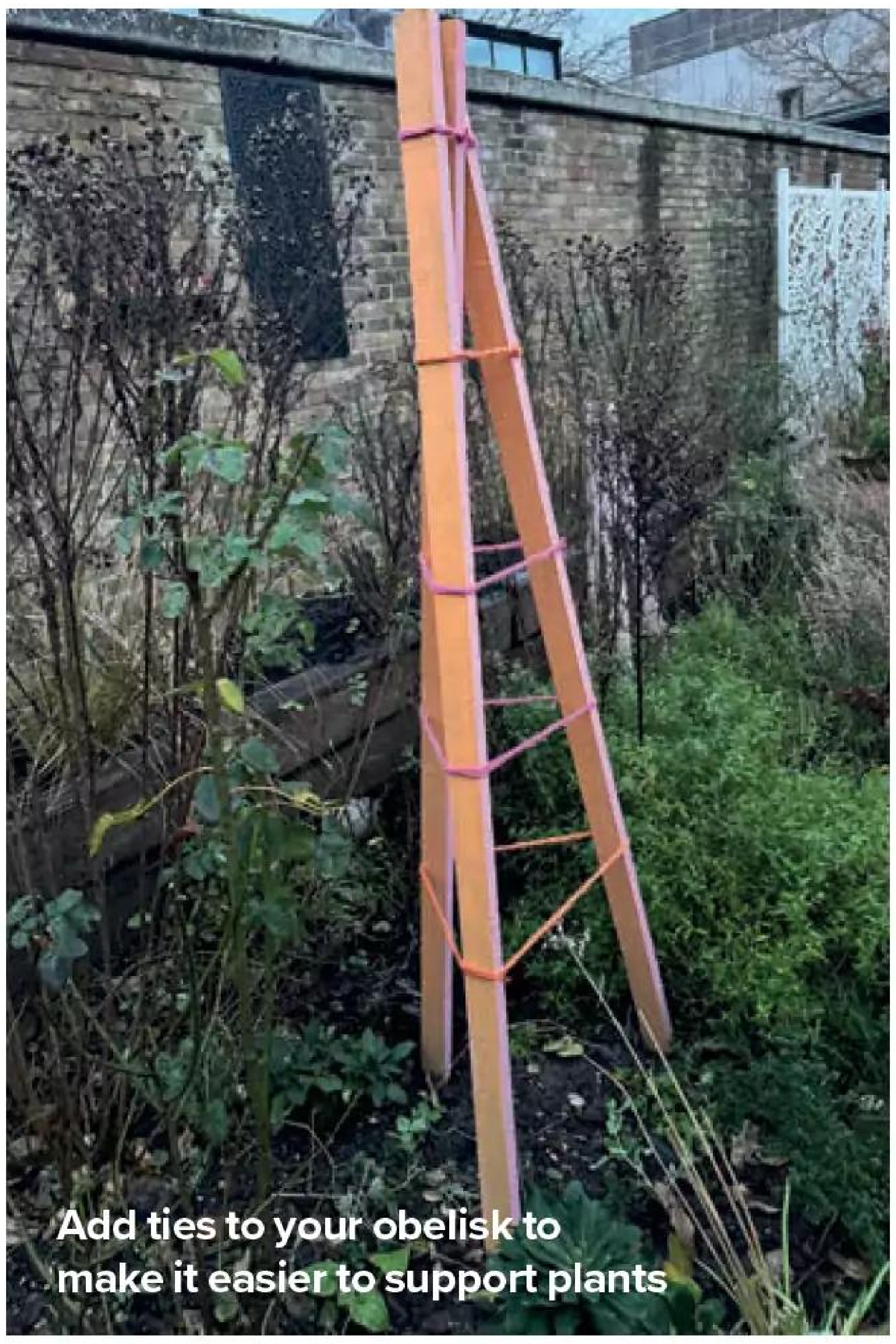
- Sand the wood
- Paint it with your chosen colour
- Fix it into the ground so it is sturdy and stable
- Tie tops with twine

Top tips

- Use more twine or wire twisted in sections around the structure at various heights to form a practical as well as decorative item to grow climbing plants up against.
- Using your new found *Shou Sugi Ban* skills, burn the ends of softwood offcuts to prolong their lifespan by sustainably creating an impermeable barrier when the ends are plunged into the ground.



Rosie is making a simple obelisk for climbing plants



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THE SELF-SUFFICIENT (ish) GARDENER

with Andrew Oldham

Andrew Oldham explains how to make use of this age- old method of helping extend the growing year

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How to make your own hot bed

Andrew Oldham explains how to use a centuries-old method for early cropping

All images unless otherwise credited: Andrew Oldham

Winter bites, but long before we hung up our secateurs and headed for the fireside, the gardeners of the past turned to fresh manure in the cold months in order to extend the growing season.

The hotbed has a long history, going as far back as when the Romans were here, and was especially popular in the 17th century when estate and market gardeners wanted to bring out-of-season crops to the dinner table. The idea of eating strawberries in the depths of winter may diminish our eco-credentials today, when much of our fresh fruit and veg is imported and stacked high in supermarkets when it 'shouldn't' be, but the race for growing out-of-season produce is actually more than 2,000 years old and something that many of us can do without fear of a massive carbon footprint.

Above: One of Andrew's home-made hot beds used for direct seed sowing

Over the years I've constructed hotbeds in the traditional way using old boards to make a deep bed around 1.2m (4ft) deep and square. I make sure the bed is facing south, in a sheltered position or even in a greenhouse, and then fill the first 1m (3ft) with rotting horse manure, straw and all, from spent bedding.

I allow around a fortnight for the manure to settle, adding more if needed. Then I cap with around 20-25cm (8-10in) of garden soil and compost mixed 50:50, firm it down gently, as if preparing a seed tray, and directly sow into it.

You must never plant into the manure and the depth of soil depends on what you have chosen to grow. In the past I've

Hot beds can be planted into, as well as used akin to heat mats for seedling trays

planted strawberry runners, radishes, courgettes, lettuce and many other vegetables. I always cover the bed at night with a make-do cloche, such as old windowpanes, plastic sheeting or even a cold frame roof.

The latter is the easier way, and the traditional way, allowing you to plant within the cold frame, and making air circulation during the day much easier, for this bed relies on you to uncover it during the day and cover it up at night. All watering must be done by you too, and the water must be tepid. An easy way to do that is to always have a watering can full in the greenhouse, which will warm up during the day.

The science of a hotbed

Hotbed sowings can get leggy and suffer from mildew if left covered all the time. On sunny days, a hotbed should have air circulation by propping up the chosen cover by a few inches. The science of a hotbed is simple, and like any manure or compost heap turned on a cold winter's day, the gardener will observe the amount of heat steaming out. This is the heat the gardener wants and has used over the past 400 years to bring spring forward and push winter back.

As the manure rots, a steady warmth is emitted up through the soil/compost mix and the explosion of microbial life reaches out for the roots of the crops. It has to be noted that hotbeds also release carbon dioxide and methane, but not on the scale of international shipping. Likewise, hotbeds do not have to be large but must always be deep to generate the heat needed. They can also be used to start seedlings without the need for heat mats by placing seed trays onto the soil.

After four months, the hotbed will start to cool and the contents can be returned to the garden. A good hotbed will also heat up a small greenhouse, keeping it largely frost-free, which will save you money and utilise a waste product that can be reused later in the year to feed your garden.

Future thinking - a self-sufficiency idea: grow to preserve

Sow seeds for produce you can use to make winter preserves, such as tomatoes, chillies, cucumbers, and aubergines. All of these can be preserved later in the year for use over winter and can be started now on a warm windowsill.

About **Andrew Oldham**

■ Andrew Oldham is a self-sufficient(ish) gardener who believes in the joy of down-to-earth growing and cooking. He lives high on the Saddleworth hills with his family at Pig Row. Find him on all social media platforms as **@lifeonpigrow**

Many different soil-improving manure options

© Shutterstock

1. Source some manure from local farms, stables or garden centres. It can take up to five to sixmonths to decay if not touched, or as little as eight weeks if turned regularly, depending on the weather and temperature. Manure that is ready to use will look brown, be crumbly to the touch, and have no smell.

The gardener has a wide choice of manures at this time of year:

Chicken manure
A great source of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, but not suitable for using directly. If you keep your own hens, you will have a steady supply of it. It is also available as a dried, pelleted product. It acts as a great compost accelerator when mixed in with other brown and green ingredients.

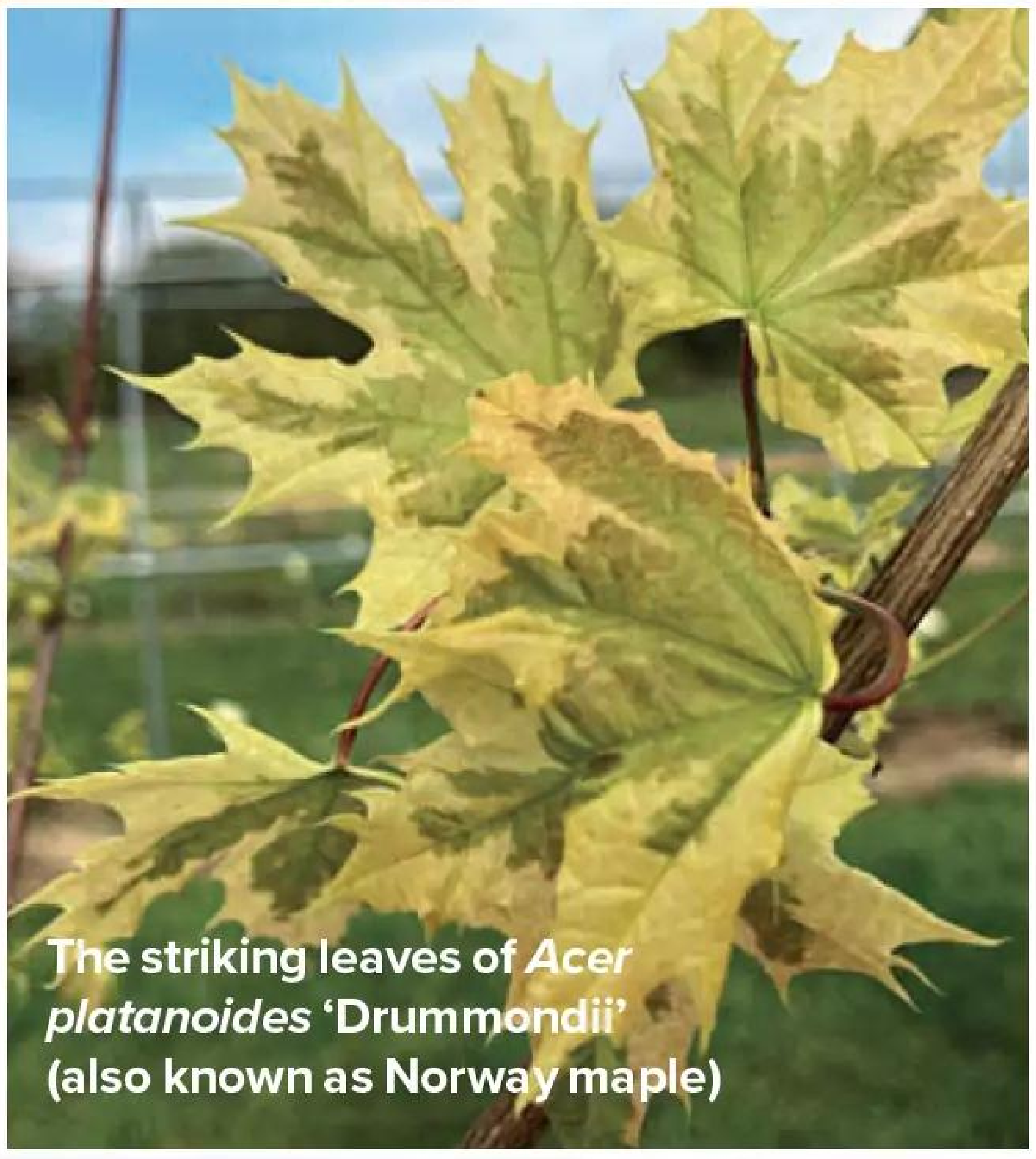
Horse manure
The most common manure due to people keeping horses. It is a good choice for gardens because it has a balanced nutrient profile. However, always stack manure for several months to avoid hidden weeds or weedkiller residue.

Sheep manure
Not readily available everywhere in the UK, it has a lower nutrient content than other manures, but still provides organic matter and nutrients to the soil. Combined with unwanted fleeces, the sheep by-products have a valuable place as mulches in the garden.

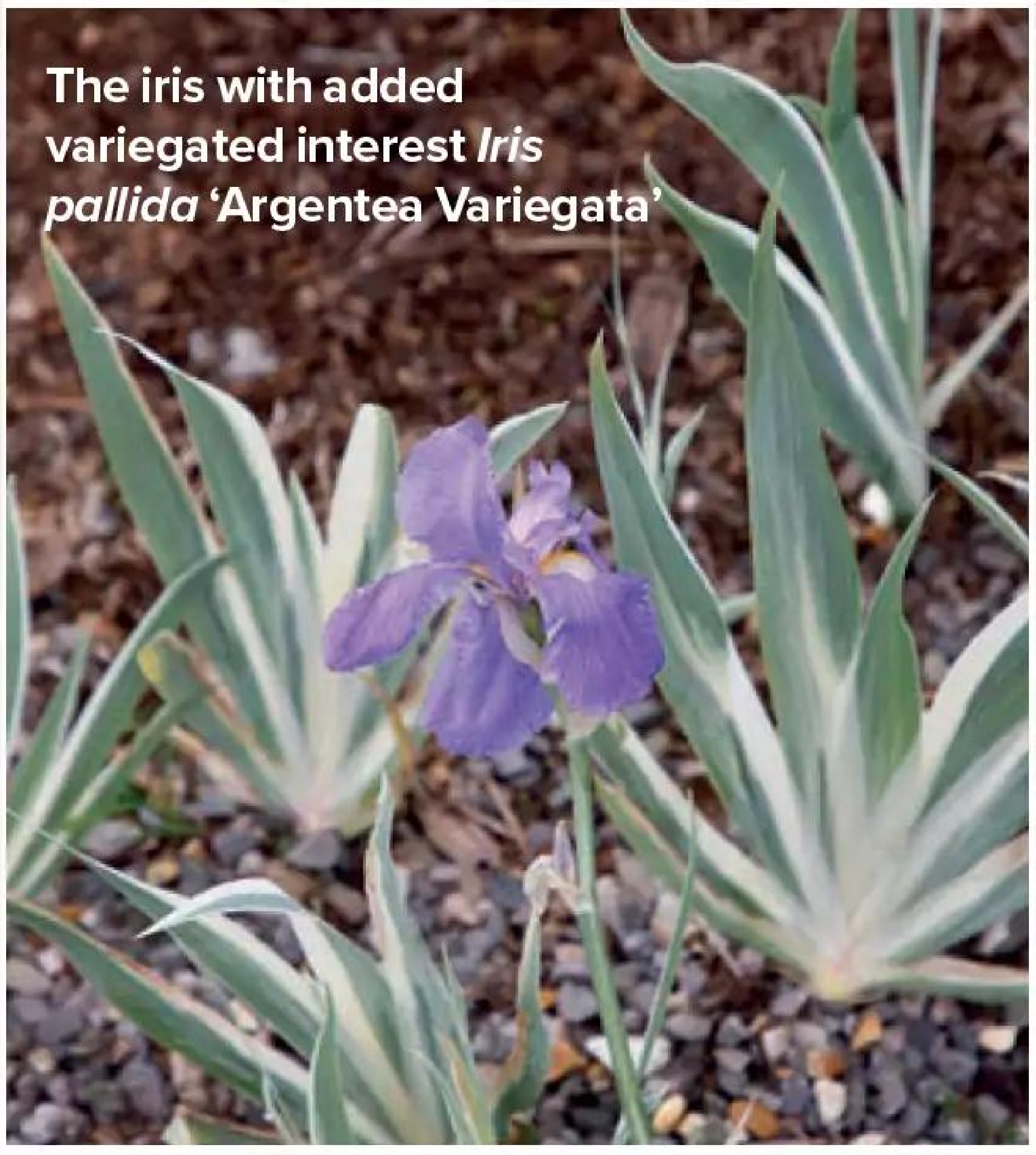
Cow manure
Contains nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, the primary nutrients for plant growth. It also makes a great manure tea - simply put some in an old pillowcase and submerge into a full water butt and make your own plant feed!

Easy to grow variegated foliage

Liz Zorab shares her favourite green highlights for the garden



The striking leaves of *Acer platanoides* 'Drummondii' (also known as Norway maple)



The iris with added variegated interest *Iris pallida* 'Argentea Variegata'

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As if nature didn't offer sufficient variations in the colour, size, shape and style of plants, there is the additional choice of leaves that are variegated. They usually offer two or more colours in one leaf, most often a green leaf with paler highlights but occasionally there are plants that have leaves with a dark variegation.

I like to grow a combination of the all-green leaves and the variegated leaves of the same plant, often side by side, to enhance the differences between them. Variegated leaves tend to perform best in full light, and there is a potential for leaves to revert to all-green if they have low light levels or if the plant is stressed, such as when there are extremes of temperature. There are exceptions, of course, but that's the wonderful thing about nature.

Variegated leaves are a great way to 'lift' a dull area and continue adding interest to a border even when the plant is not in flower. Here are some of my favourite plants with variegated leaves that provide a good display and I have found easy to grow.

Nasturtium Alaska Mixed

I grew this nasturtium variety for the first time in 2023 and was delighted with its performance. Like all annual nasturtiums, known botanically as *Tropaeolum major*, it required almost no attention and flowered nicely from summer until the first heavy frost.

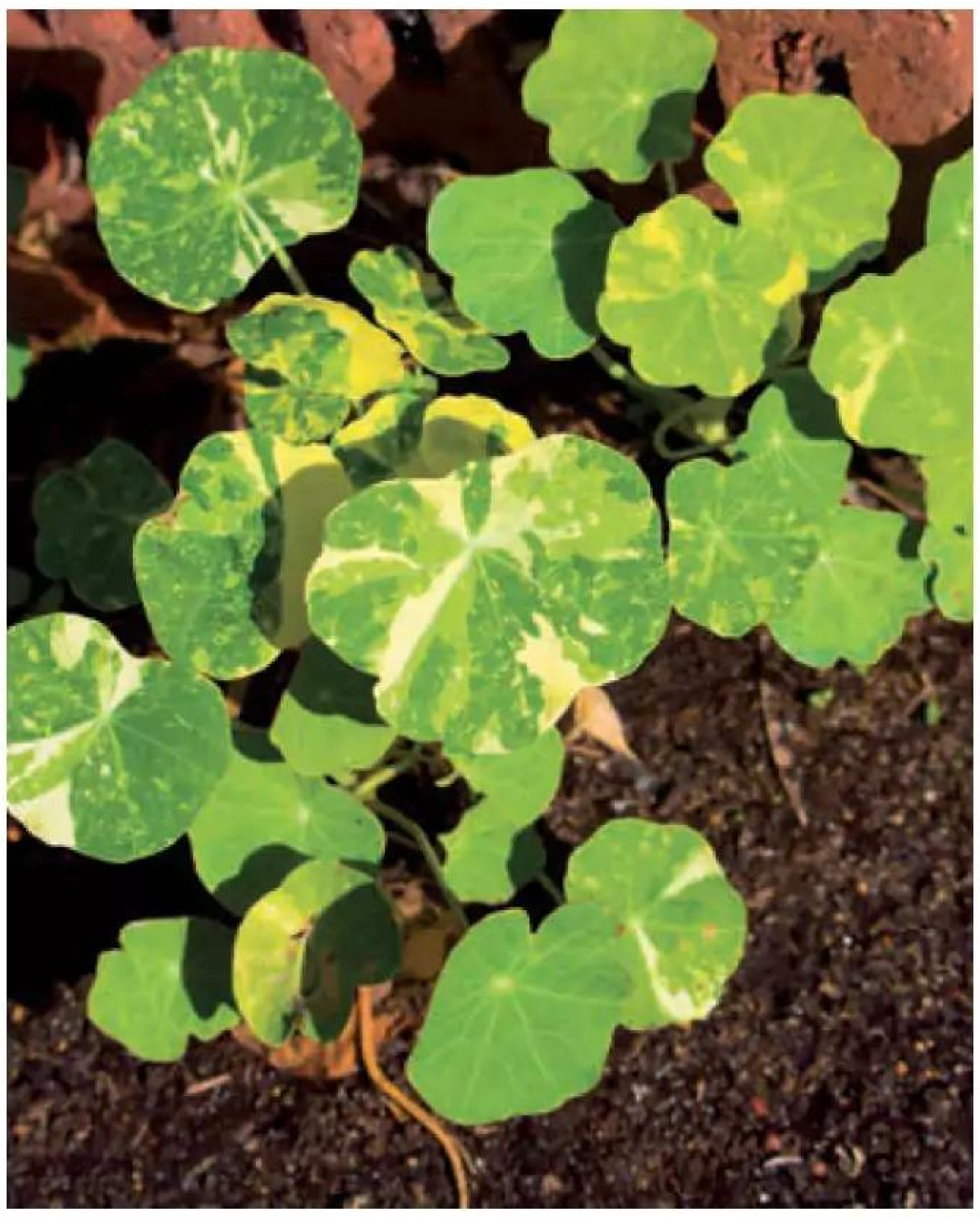
The leaves are mottled and splashed with cream and the flowers, for the most part, are held above the foliage. I like to start them in pots to plant out when they have five or six leaves and use them to fill gaps in beds and borders.

I let them scramble across paths and up fences and they are ideal for attracting butterflies, so make sure you plant them away from brassicas, unless you intend to use them as a 'sacrificial' companion plant in the veg patch.

Acer platanoides 'Drummondii'

The leaves of this acer are light to mid-green with wide cream edges. As it matures, more of each leaf is green, but they still have a cream edge. The pale yellow flowers, which are often unnoticed, appear in spring before the leaves.

It is ideal for a medium to large garden. Eventual height and spread are 12m (39ft). This tree, also known as Norway maple, is fast growing, forms a rounded head and is easy to maintain. If you do need to prune dead or crossing branches, do so during the winter while the tree is dormant.



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Pretty and easy to grow trailing, mottled leaves of nasturtium Alaska Mixed

Iris pallida 'Argentea Variegata'

As if irises didn't already add plenty to the garden, along comes a variety with variegated leaves!

These semi-evergreen plants have survived some very cold and wet weather on our north-facing hillside and are still thriving. They prefer sandy and loam soils that are neutral to acid and in full sun. During the summer, fragrant light purple flowers are borne on upright stems. Height and spread 90x30cm (3x1ft).

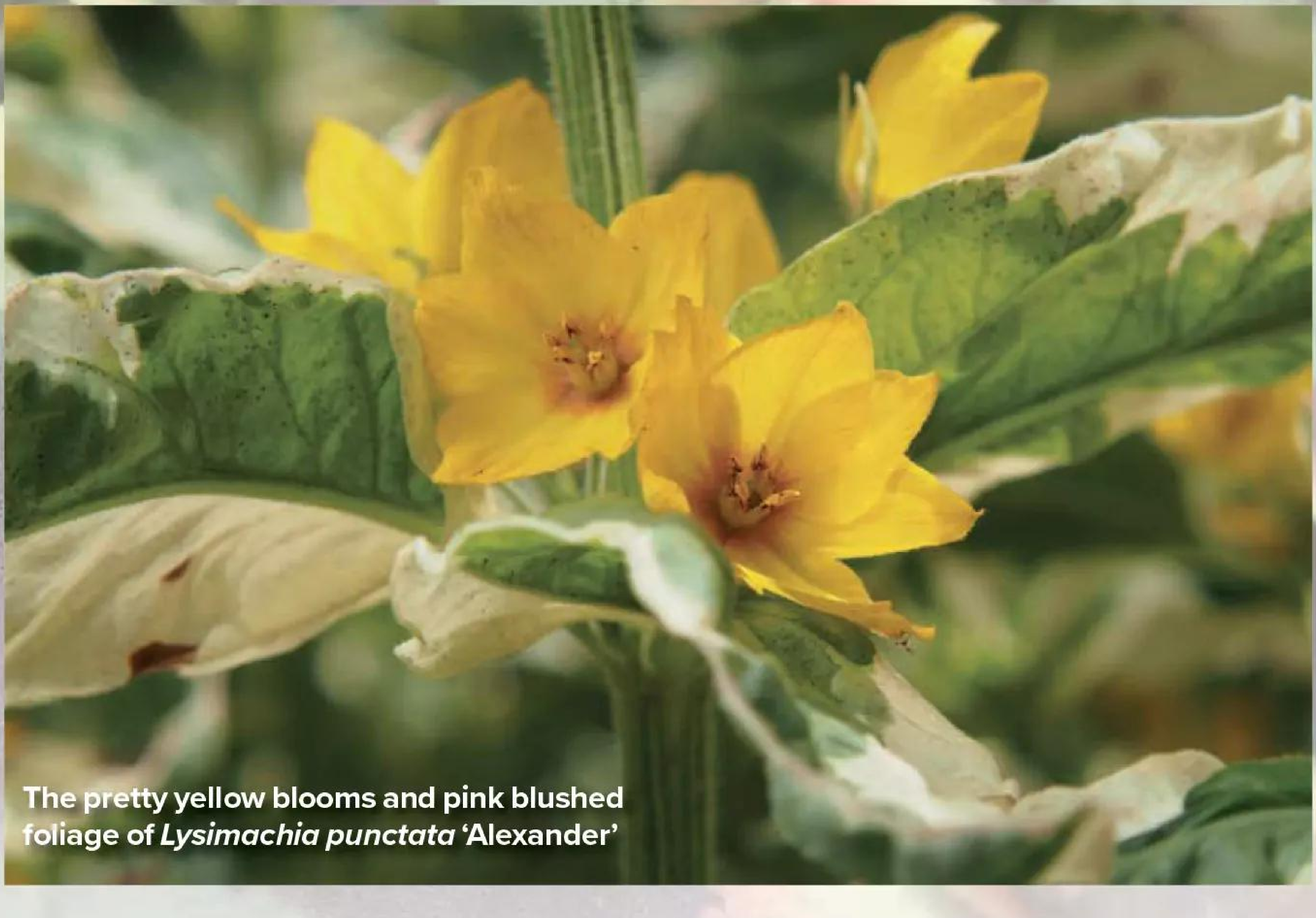
Propagate by division in late summer or early autumn.

Lysimachia punctata 'Alexander'

This variegated strain of loosestrife has pink blushed foliage in spring. It is a vigorous grower and will quickly form a large clump.

During the summer intense yellow

All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab



The pretty yellow blooms and pink blushed foliage of *Lysimachia punctata* 'Alexander'

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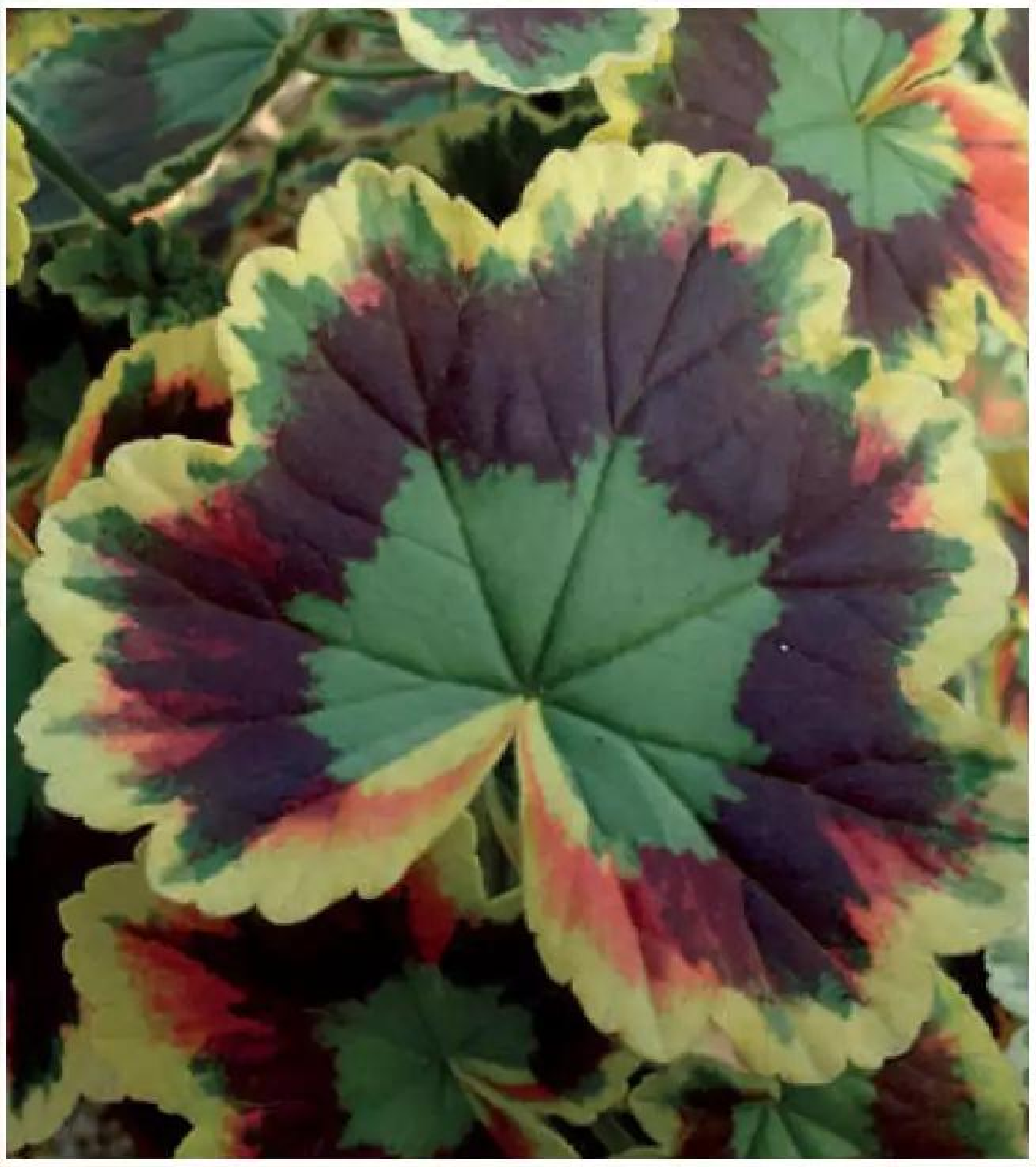


Striking colours of *Pelargonium* 'Mrs. Pollock'

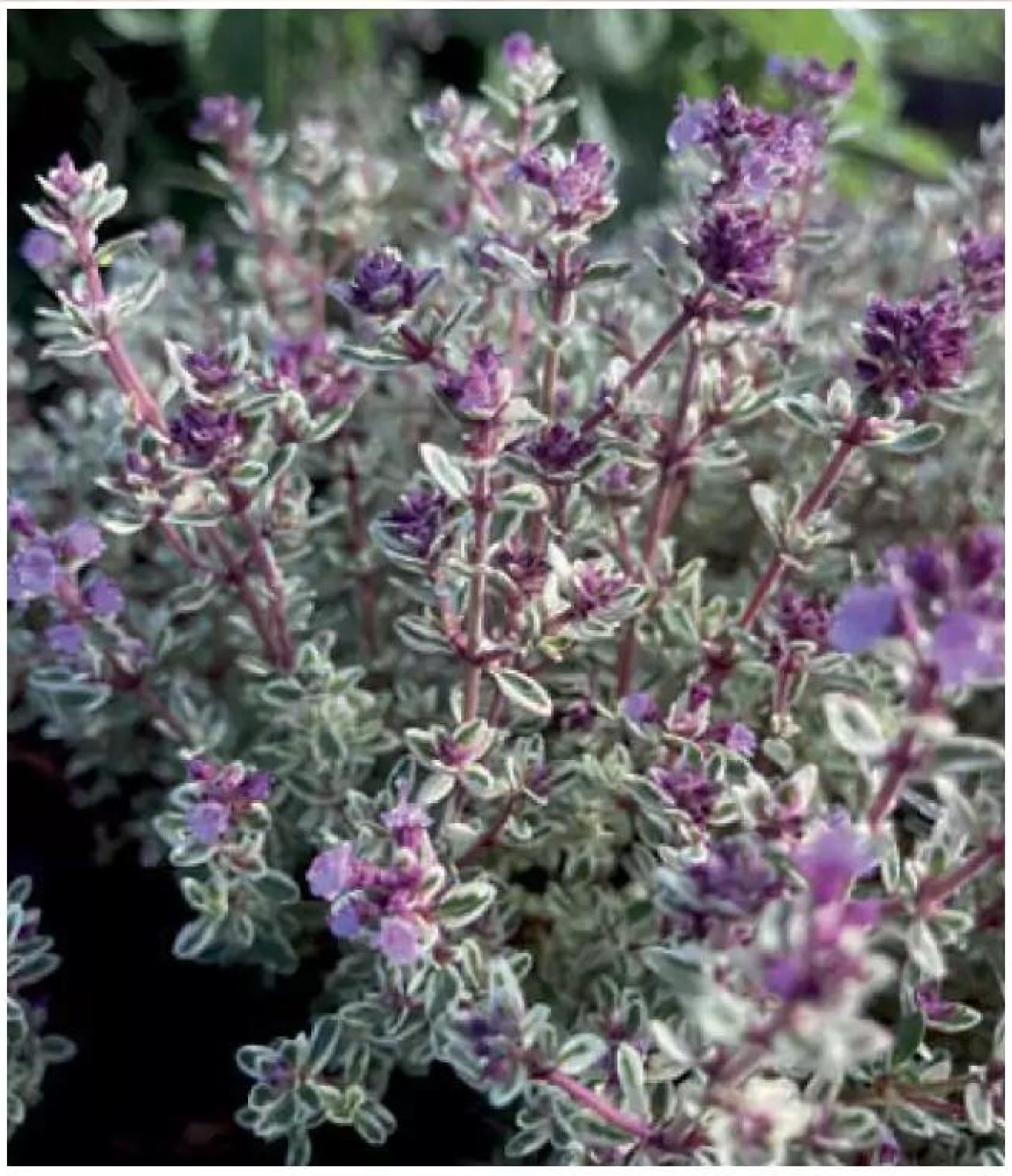
flowers appear at the leaf axils giving a strong display of colour in the border. It is happy in full sun and partial shade and prefers moist, but well-drained loam or clay soils. It will also grow in boggy areas if you keep the crown above water level.

Height 60-90cm (2-3ft) and 60cm (2ft) spread. Propagate by division in spring or autumn.

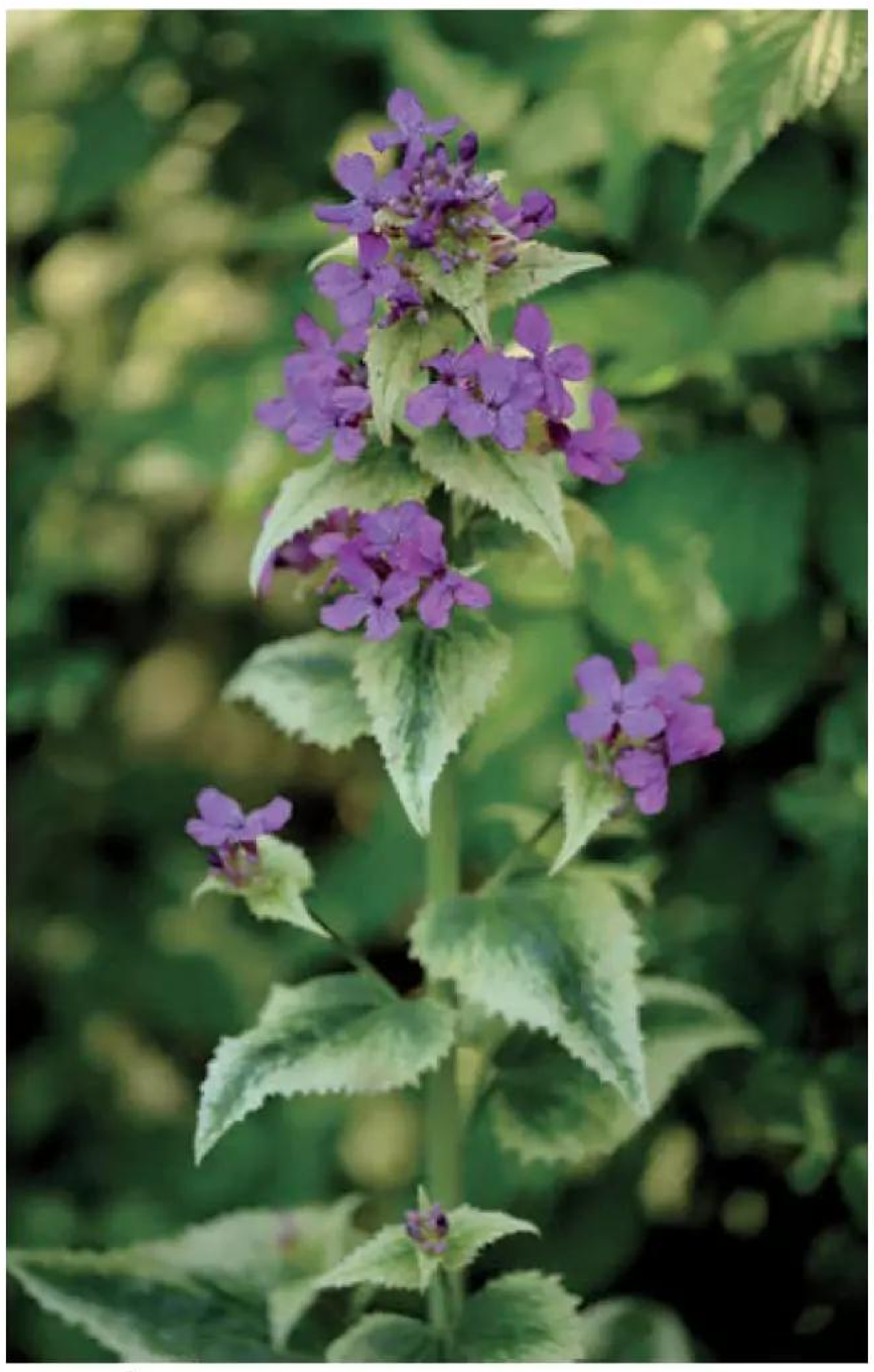
Lunaria annua var. *albiflora* 'Alba Variegata'

Honesty has so much going for it. The punchy purple, or white, flowers appear in late spring, followed by attractive seed pods that open to reveal the seeds inside a silvery disc. This variegation provides a splash of creamy white.

The leaves are pale with a green central section and they contrast nicely against the rich purple of the flowers. This biennial grows to a height and spread off 60x50cm (2x1.5ft). It will self seed readily, or you can collect the seeds and grow in pots to plant out during the first year. Honesty grows happily in all but clay soils and is hardy across the UK.



ABOVE: Variegated thyme is one of Liz's favourites



Honestly, this biennial beauty has so much going for it *Lunaria annua* var. *albiflora* 'Alba Variegata' (honesty)

Variegated thyme

I include a variegated thyme in a lot of my 'favourite' lists, and for good reason. It is a low-growing, evergreen perennial that provides excellent ground cover and is good for culinary use.

The tiny flowers are fairly insignificant individually, but clustered together on top of the purple stems, they attract pollinators and provide an additional splash of colour on an already interesting plant.

It may not survive in heavy clay or waterlogged soil and prefers a well-draining position in full sun.

Pelargonium 'Mrs. Pollock'

Like many zonal pelargoniums, 'Mrs Pollock' has dark purple-red markings as well as a yellowy cream edge to each leaf. It produces bright scarlet flowers held on stems well above the foliage.

Pelargoniums are tender plants and require protection from cold and frost, so should be put in containers and protected from before the first frosts occur and until after all risk of them has passed.

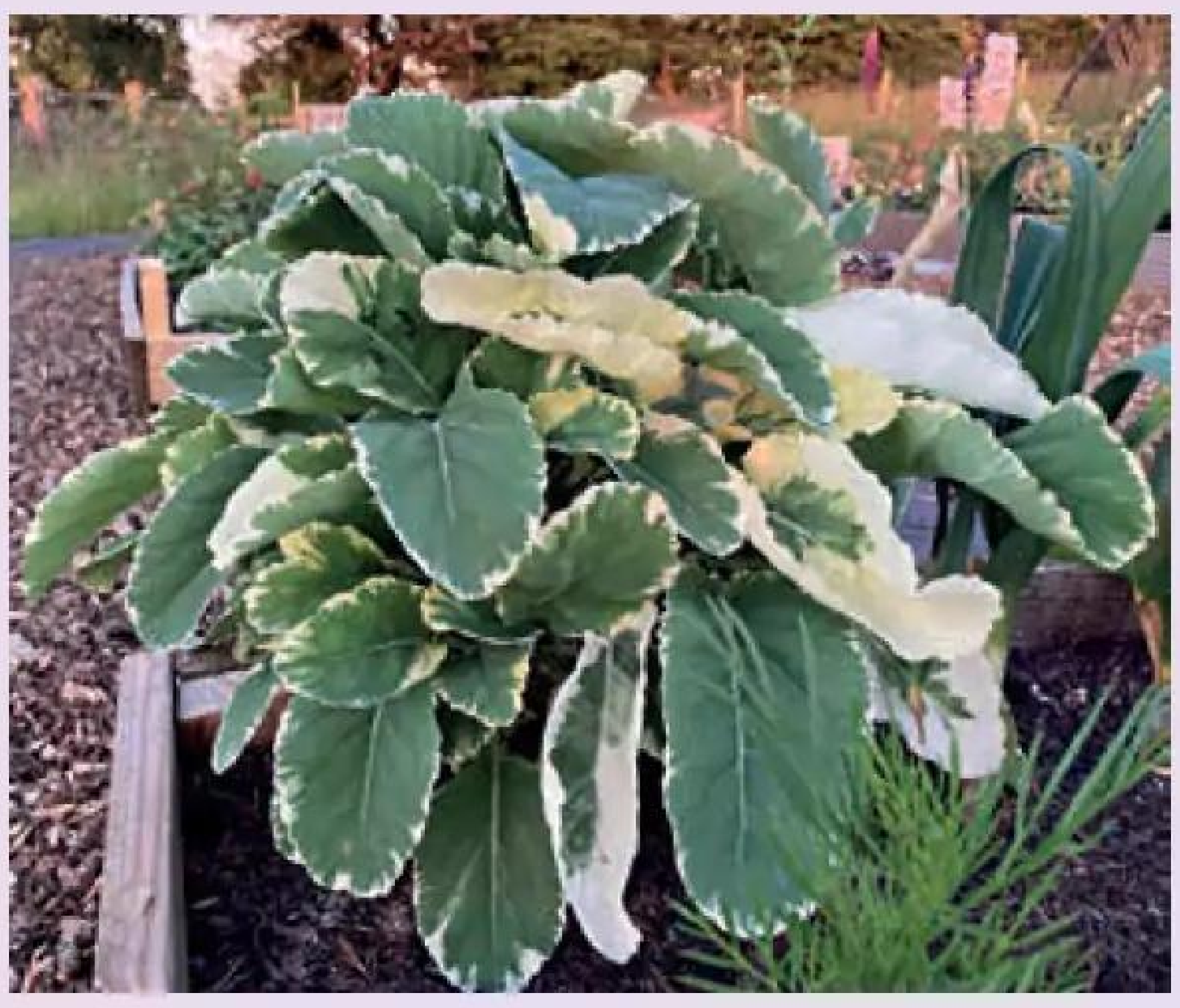
During winter, water sparingly and allow the compost to dry out between waterings. To propagate, take cuttings from spring to autumn.

Add an edible

Kale 'Daubenton's variegata'

Of all the perennial kales, I think this is the most attractive. It is easy to grow from cuttings, even during the winter months, and grows into a mound of green leaves edged with cream. Occasionally almost an entire leaf may be cream.

Height and spread 1m (3.2ft). Pick leaves throughout the year for a tasty addition to the kitchen, leaving the plant in the ground. Plants live up to eight years and are hardy across the UK in all but the most severe winters.



Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

National Nest Box Week!

To celebrate National Nest Box Week (14-21 Feb), I thought we'd look at a few facts about garden birds.

For example, did you know that ivy is one of the best plants to encourage birds to your garden? In autumn, when it flowers, insects are attracted by the pollen. This, in turn, provides food for birds (particularly robins and wrens). In winter, its black berries are eaten by blackbirds and thrushes, as well as starlings, waxwings, finches and jays. The leaves also provide nesting and roosting shelter for small birds.

Worst bird award

Much as we love them, and appreciate the assistance they provide with natural pest control, some garden birds cause us problems – bullfinches may eat a few fruit buds in spring, and blackbirds definitely nibble hanging fruits in autumn. But by far the worst bird award goes to the woodpigeon.

This bird comes, usually with friends, and can peck and tear at leaves of all types of cabbages, broccoli, cauliflowers, kale and so on, as well as peas and, strangely, lilac! Pigeons will also go for small fruits in season, such as cherries and currants. In the ornamental garden, they'll strip holly bushes of berries in no time.

Barrier protection, such as netting, is the only way to keep them away from our plants, and this isn't always possible (as in the case of taller fruit trees).

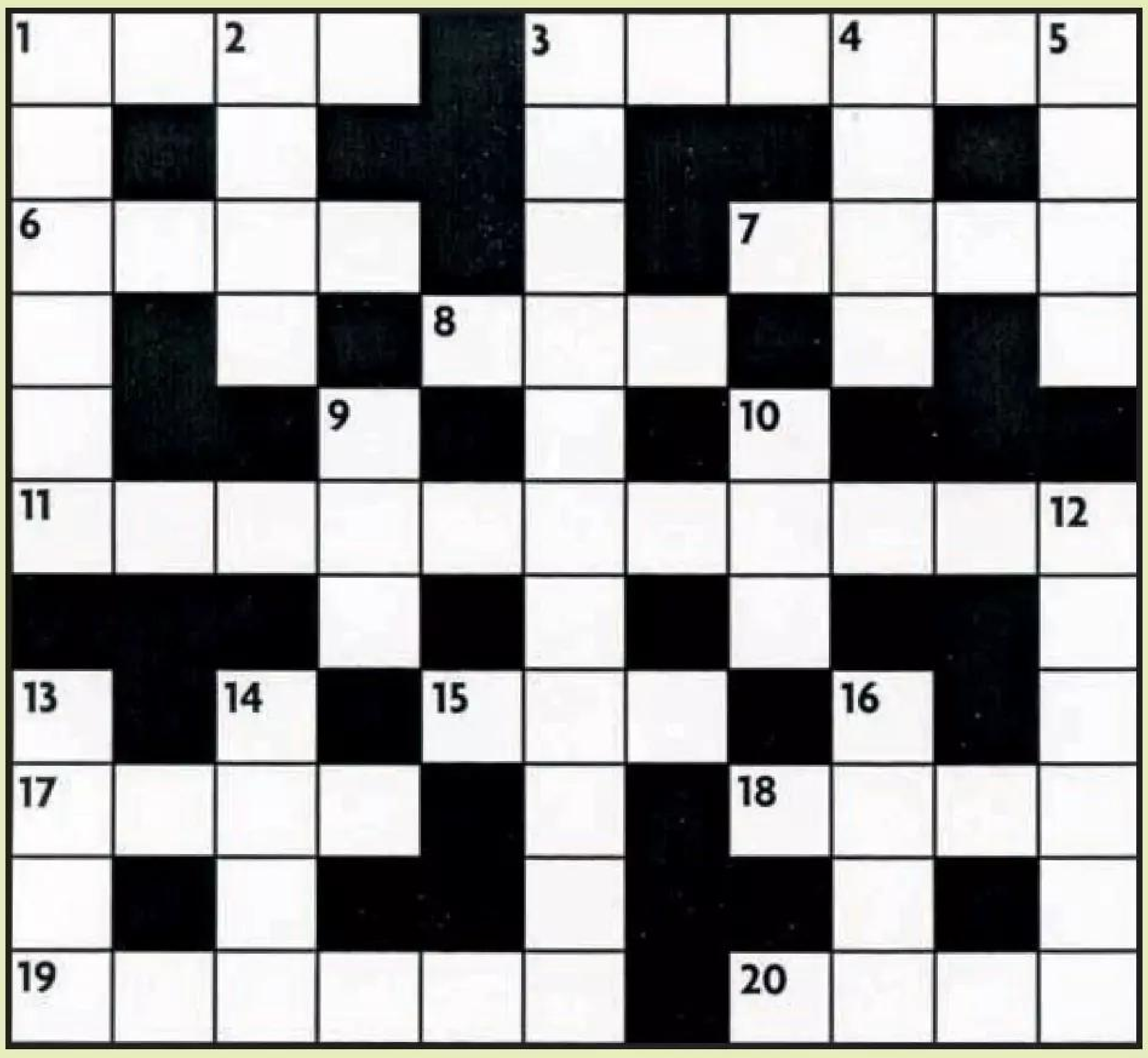
Wow! I didn't know that...

- Generally, birds do not sing when they are on the ground; they only sing when perching on something off of the ground, or while they are flying.
- There is a high mortality rate for robins in their first year of life, but once they have passed their first year, the average life span is 12 years; one robin has been recorded as reaching 19 years of age.
- Birds dream when they sleep. Research conducted by the University of Chicago found that they dream about their songs, have dream rehearsals, and even sing the same songs better the next day.
- 1,400 wrens weigh about the same as a fully grown adult swan.

This fortnight in gardening history

5 February 1840 John Boyd Dunlop, Scottish vet and inventor, was born. He is famous for inventing the pneumatic tyre: generations of wheelbarrow-pushers have him to thank for making their tasks easier!
7 February 1940 The Disney feature film *Pinocchio* premiered in New York City. It is believed that Italian author Carlo Collodi created the name 'Pinocchio' after the Tuscan dialect for 'pine nut', or perhaps because of the standard Italian word for the pine tree, which is *pino*.
8 February 1897 Roger Crompton Notcutt purchased a nursery at Woodbridge, Suffolk. This was later named Notcutts Nursery and, until 2007, was run entirely by the family. Today the company has 19 garden centres, and also owns Mattocks Roses.
15 February 1842 Archibald Menzies died. A Scottish surgeon and plantsman, it was he who introduced the monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*) to Britain.

Crossword... *just for fun!*



ACROSS
1 The banana genus (4)
3 Genus of tender (house) plants that have been known as kaffir lilies (6)
6 The rose 'New ____' is lovely at the beginning of the day! (4)
7 Another name for the fruit of the Chinese gooseberry (*Actinidia deliciosa*) – although it should perhaps be more to do with New Zealand (4)
8 Extreme part of endive! (3)
11 This, the common name for *Prunus serotina*, is also a variety of tomato! (5,6)
15 Common name for a tree of the abies genus (3)
17 The holly genus (4)
18 Fibre obtained from the husk of a coconut, used in making rope and matting, but also as an alternative to peat in composts (4)
19 'Amsterdam Forcing 3', 'Nantes 2 – Early' and 'Nandor' are all varieties of this vegetable (6)
20 What you hope your plants to do! (4)

DOWN
1 In botany, the strengthened 4 down along the middle of a flower petal or leaf (6)
2 The seeds have been scattered, dispersed or planted! (4)
3 Join! I prune in this state! (11)
4 In botany, the thickened portion of a leaf, containing the vascular bundle (4)
5 Type of soil, it is said, with a pH lower than 7.0 (4)
9 Top card, as in *Fuchsia* 'Red ___' and *Potentilla* 'Red ___' (3)
10 Domesticated 'family' animal found in ripe tomatoes! (3)
12 Common name for plants of the achillea genus (6)
13 Shiraz in cases – there's a soil trace element within! (4)
14 Type of animal for which the acanthus plant is a breech (4)
16 Number of leaves a piece of clover should have to be lucky! (4)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE
ACROSS 2 Musa 3 Clivia 6 Dawn 7 Kiwi 8 End 11 Black cherry 15 Fir 17 Ilex 18 Coir 19 Carrot 20 Grow **DOWN** 1 Midrib 2 Sown 3 Connecticut 4 Vein 5 Acid 9 Ace 10 Pet 12 Yarrow 13 Zinc 14 Bear 16 Four

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For the best success with this special perennial the planting soil needs to be neutral to slightly acidic, moist but well-drained and enriched with leaf mould or bulky garden compost. The site should be partially shaded with shelter from cold, dry winds. *Height: 75cm (30"). Spread: 50cm (20").*

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TOP HANDY HACKS

With **Adam Kirtland**

Which products or projects would you like Adam to cover and trial in his column? Please contact **editor@amateurgardening.com** with suggestions.

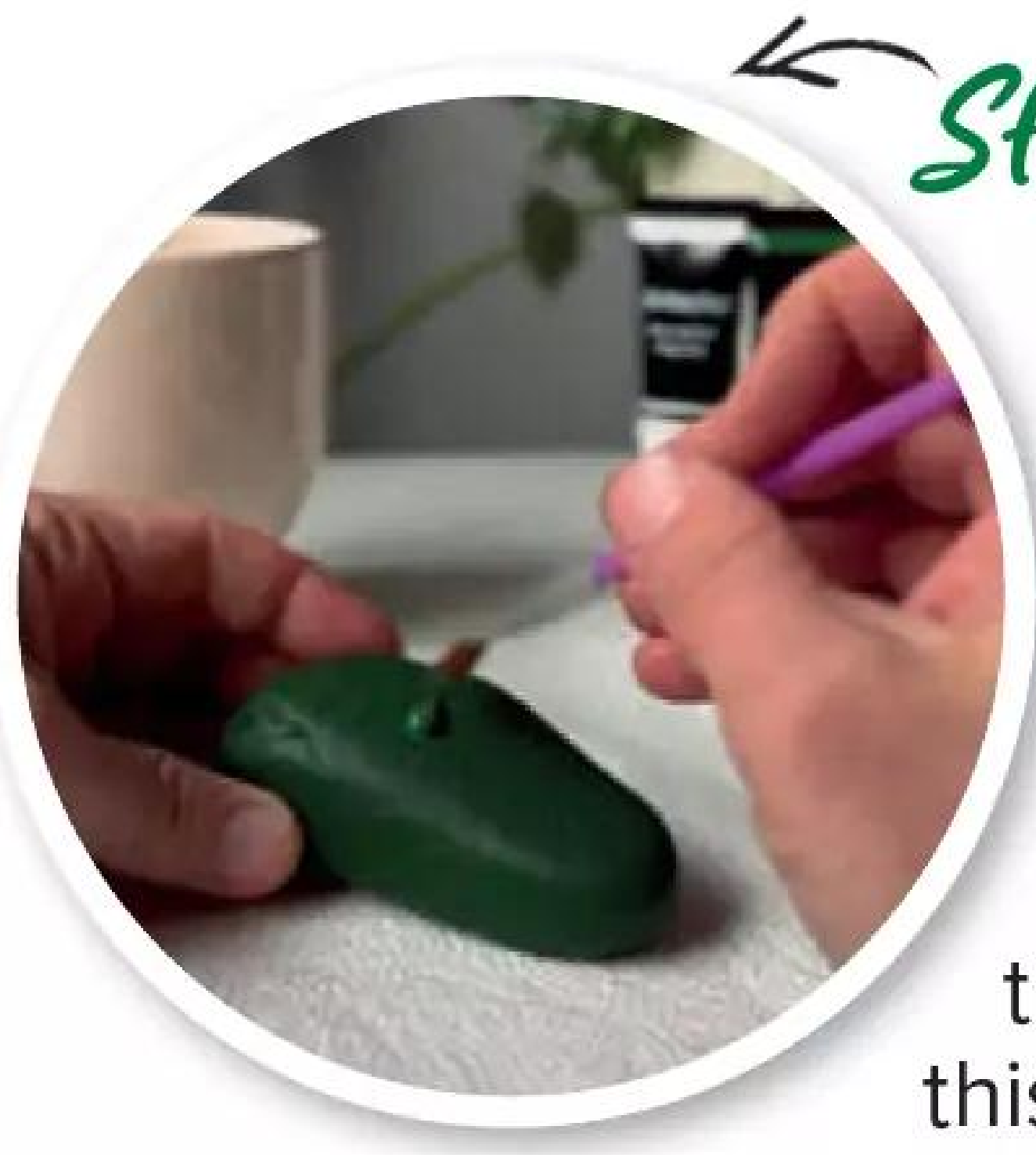
How to have... the easiest houseplant ever!

Adam explains how to make your own cactus to impress

● I've shared my shame in the past of being an awful houseplant parent, so now I've come up with a nifty little hack for giving the illusion of having houseplants in your home without the risk of them, er, dying.

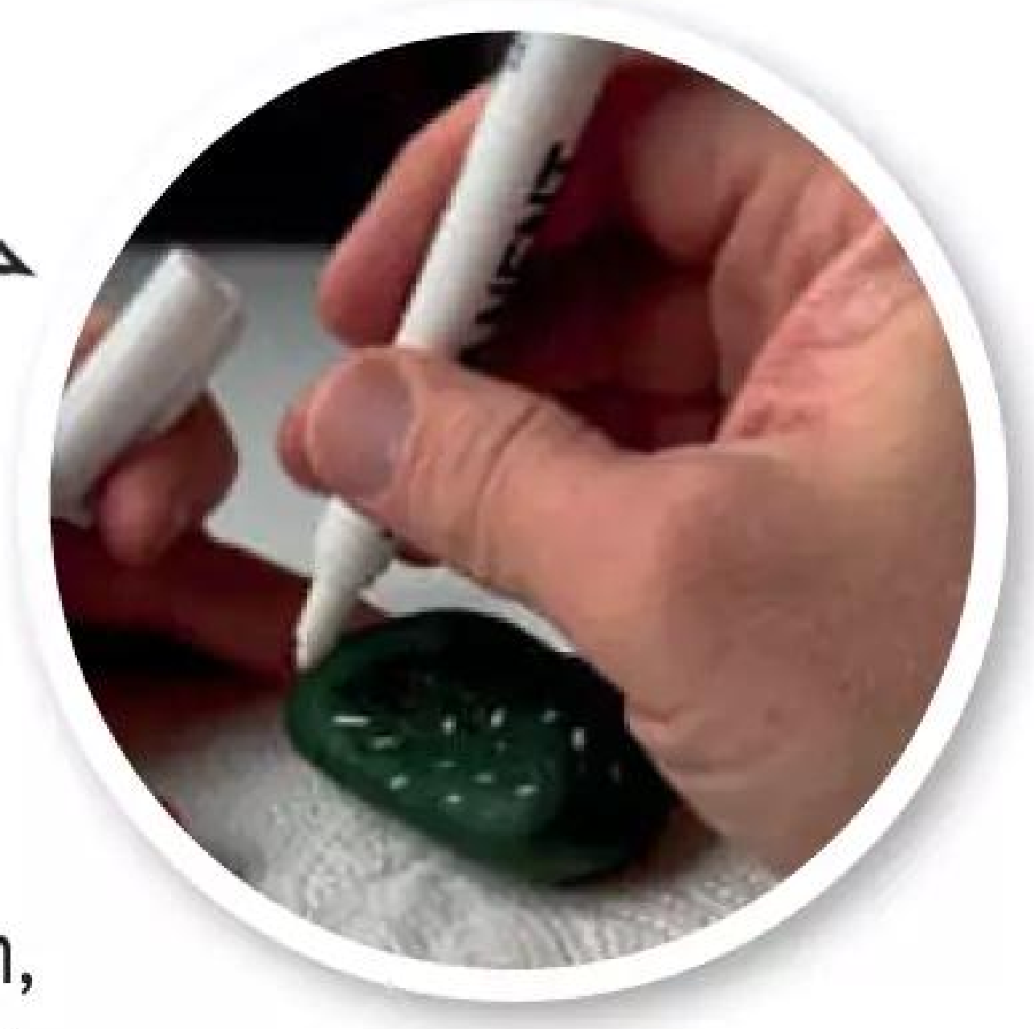
Before you all write in and tell me off, this is in no way a method for replacing houseplants. Instead, maybe think of this as a quirky decoration for your home so you can enjoy the real plants in your garden outdoors. Happy crafting!

Step 1



Find your perfect pebbles. Our driveway is covered with large stones/pebbles that are the perfect size for this make, but you could also buy them from craft shops or find them in your garden. These ones are roughly 2-5cm (1-2in) long and about 2.2cm (1in) wide, but you can work with whichever ones you have to hand. Once you've got the pebbles, you can start to paint. You can use an undercoat of white paint if you need to, but a good quality acrylic paint (which isn't expensive and is widely available) should cover this in a couple of coats. Go for whichever shade of green you prefer, but think about how cacti look and try to find something similar to that.

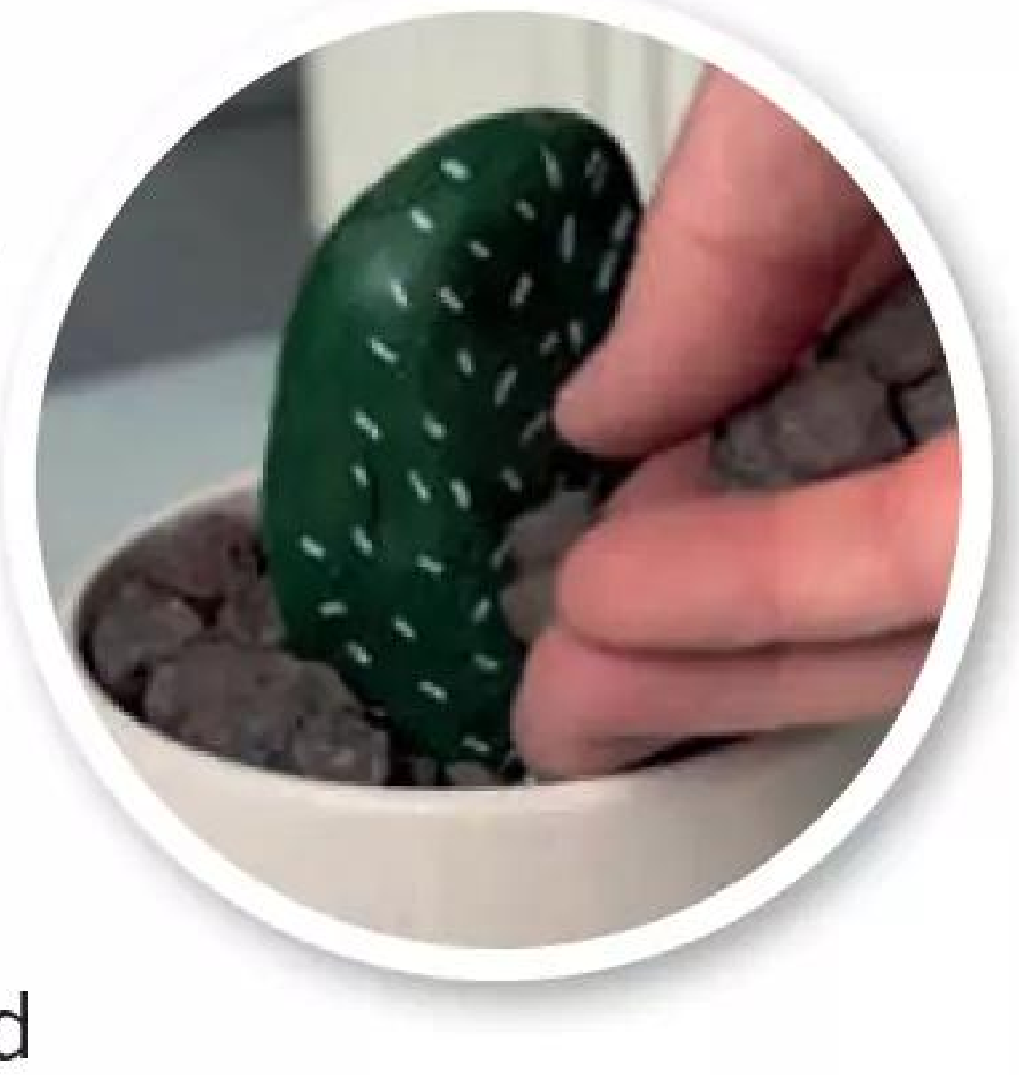
Step 2.



When you've given your pebbles a couple of coats you can begin to add the cactus detail. Using a thin, white, acrylic paint pen, or a thin brush dipped in white acrylic paint, add small 'flecks' across all sides of the stone to give the impression of the spikes on a cactus.

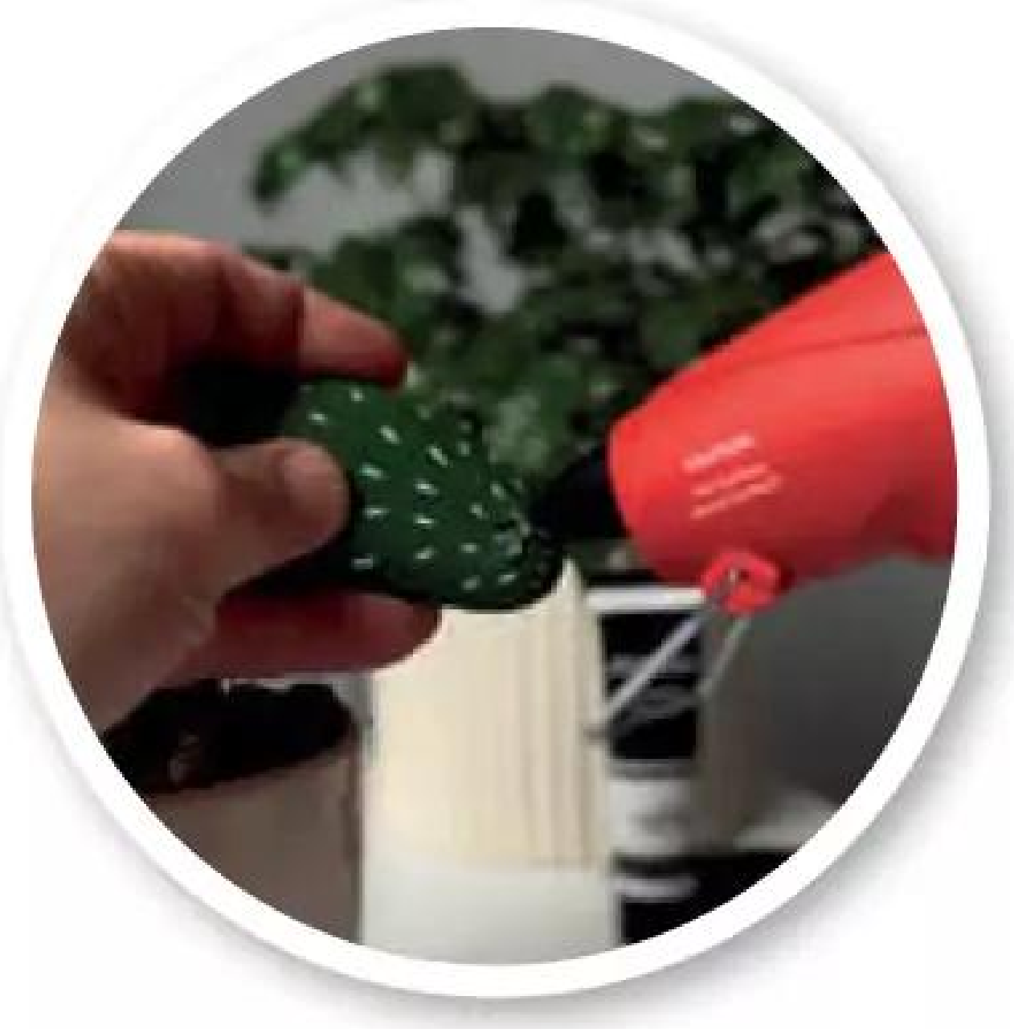
The thinner the better here, so a top tip if you don't have a thin brush is to try using a cocktail stick instead. It's best to let each side dry before moving onto the next one as the paint can smudge quite easily before it dries.

Step 3



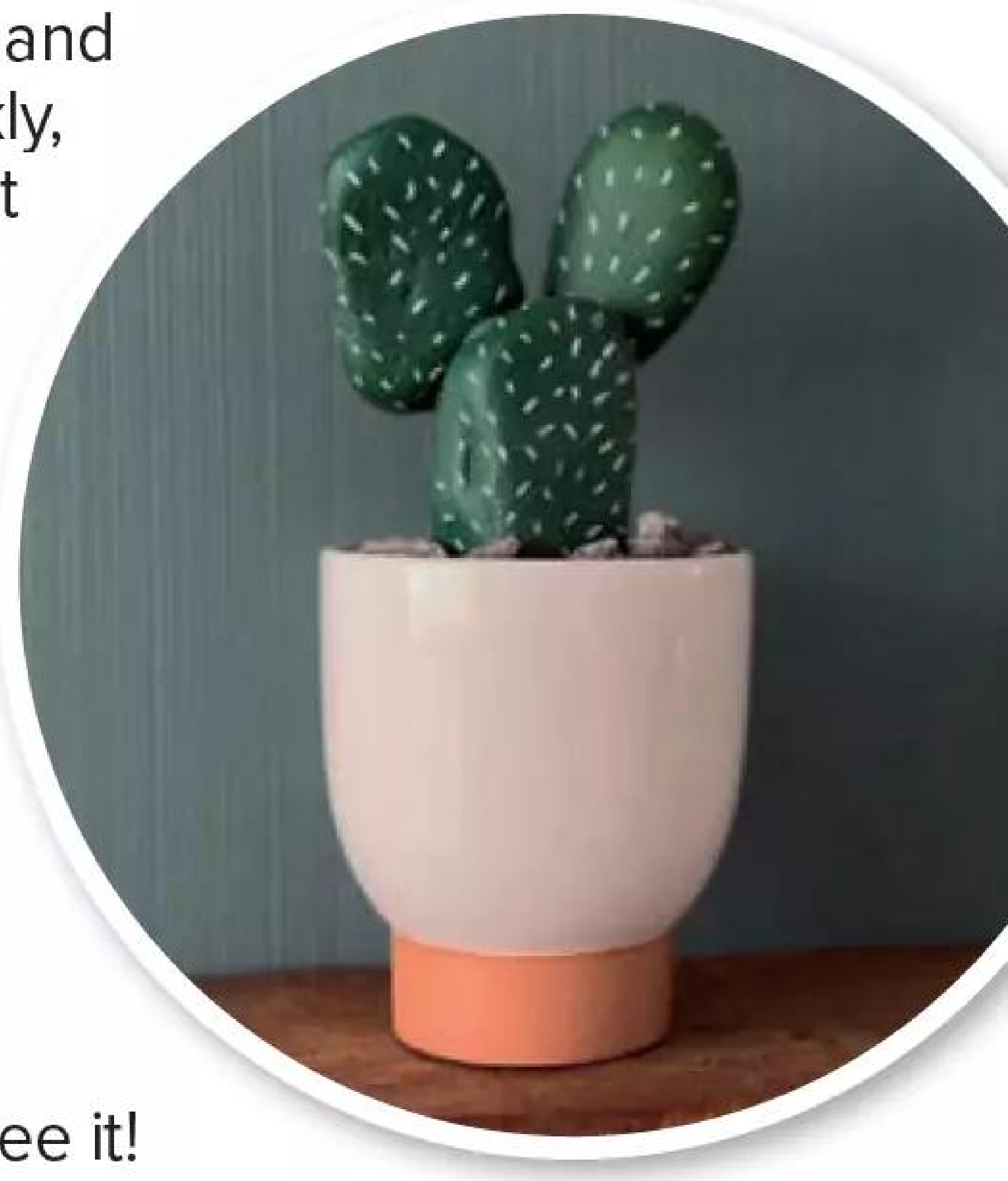
Pick a pot that you like - a small one works best but it's up to you. Add a thick layer of gravel in the bottom and then start to position your first stone with some gravel around it to hold it in place. You may need to get your hot glue gun warmed up to secure this one in, but if you start with a long stone then you may not need it.

Step 4



Glue your remaining stones in place however you like, but enjoy being creative. A hot glue gun is a wonderful tool that is perfect for this, and it dries so quickly, but if you've got more time then you could use any strong glue.

Step 5



Once complete, place your 'cactus' where everyone can see it!

A few words to the wise
Please be aware that the 1949 Coastal Protection Act states that it is illegal to remove any natural materials from the shore. Also, if you're using pebbles from the garden or a homeware store, make sure they're completely clean and dry before painting. If they're cold and wet, then the paint may not stick properly.

For more gardening advice, tips, and DIY projects, you can follow Adam on Instagram **@viewfromthepottingbench**

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Right plant, right place

In an extract from her new book *Grow Food Anywhere* our columnist **Lucy Chamberlain** explains how to maximise results from your vegetable growing with nature-friendly thinking

Just as buddleias enjoy the sun and wood anemones revel in shade, edible plants evolved in particular planting sites. Consciously thinking about these when we plant up our vegetable gardens and allotments will guarantee robust, content crops that will reward us with the very best harvests – no more disappointments.

Our current mindset for growing our own food is dominated by planting what we love – after all, there isn't much point in growing edibles that you won't eat. But a crop we love to eat may not love where we plant it in the garden. Dare I ask, how often is this even a conscious choice? Most of us are guilty of plonking a vegetable plot where we have room for it, often away from the house as an afterthought, playing second fiddle to our flowerbeds and social areas. The consequences could be sulking crops shoehorned into places they don't enjoy. That's why there is a real need to assess and fine-tune our attitude towards food growing.

© Lucy Chamberlain

In her new book, Lucy explains how to use right plant, right place techniques to boost food growing results

Are we thinking of edibles in the wrong way?

As gardeners, we are forever taught that clematis thrive with shaded roots, rhododendrons prefer acidic soil, and pelargoniums revel in full sun, so perhaps we should be more mindful that edibles have specific growing needs, too. If we start giving them the conditions they enjoy, they will be naturally vigorous, robust, and healthy, ready to deliver maximum yields, and surely that's the objective when growing your own food.

Crops thrive in specific locations

Edibles evolved in specific climates, just like ornamental plants. For example, figs revel in Mediterranean sunshine, redcurrants are happy in the shade of Western Europe, and celery appreciates marshland soils of the Mediterranean basin. So understanding a plant's natural growing conditions will help

Kitchen gardens can look beautiful as well as being productive

us choose crops that will thrive in any given part of our garden, delivering fantastic yields as a result. We really can grow food anywhere.

Work with nature

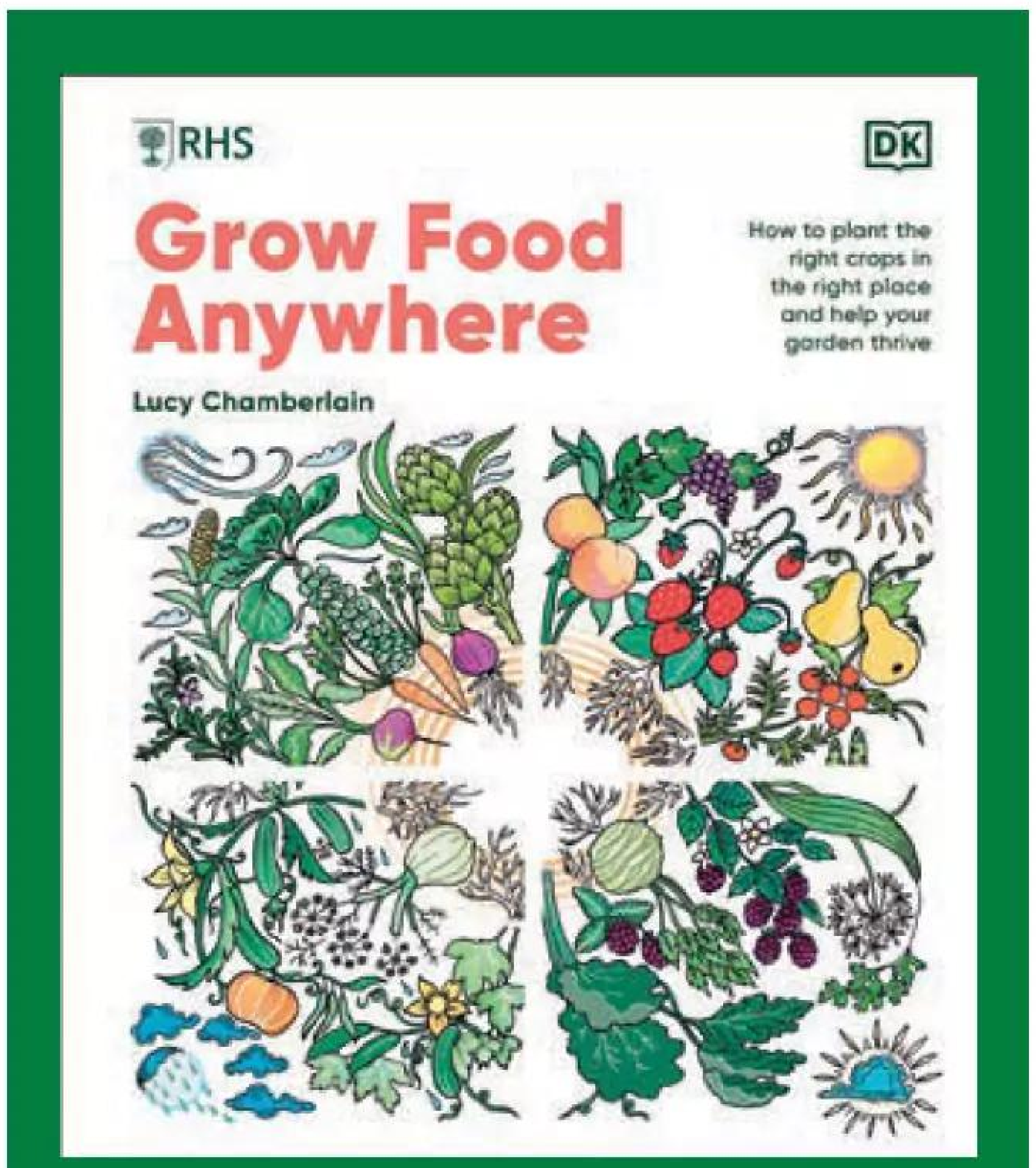
Understanding individual crops' needs allows you to focus your efforts on what they enjoy. Earmark impoverished sites for robust crops that don't need mollycoddling. Simultaneously, be more targeted with resources by reserving moist soil for thirsty crops, and fertile beds for hungry feeders. We gardeners benefit hugely! You'll actually need to do less work – less watering, less feeding – working with nature takes the effort out of growing your own food, and the positive results will speak for themselves.

Conserve your resources. For example, position thirsty crops like bulb fennel or hostas away from a dry soil – otherwise you'll be forever throwing water at them, they will struggle, you'll get disheartened, and you'll also be wasting that resource. Instead, reserve dry zones for drought-resistant crops – there are plenty to choose from. Asparagus, orache, seakale, salsify, tree spinach, and lima beans are just a few examples. Equally, a crop that prefers sharp drainage and good air movement, globe artichoke, agretti, or horn of plenty, for example, could rot in a shady, damp spot – that soil moisture would be far more beneficial to another, more appropriate edible such as celeriac or sorrel.

Gain better harvests

Working with nature, by definition, gives better yields. Tomatoes and aubergines would offer scant harvests in cool shade, yet position them against a south- or west-facing sunny fence and they'll produce an almighty, delicious glut of fruits. Annual spinach, conversely, would quickly run to seed in such blazing summer heat but give it a cool, shady border and it will reward you with a prolonged and abundant lushness of foliage.

The bottom line? Understand your crops and they will be healthier and give you larger yields. Ultimately, this more focused, holistic mindset benefits everything – and everyone.


RHS
DK
Grow Food Anywhere
How to plant the right crops in the right place and help your garden thrive
Lucy Chamberlain

About the book

RHS Grow Food Anywhere - How to Plant the Right Crops in the Right Place and Help Your Garden Thrive is published by DK and available now.

It explains how to grow fruits and vegetables that will thrive in their space, large or small, sunny or shady...

Some of Lucy's star performers for a shady and wet area

Shuttlecock fern

Eat the young emerging fronds of this hardy Northern Hemisphere species (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) as "fiddleheads". Harvest while small and tender, and cook (not edible raw).

To avoid overcropping plants, only take one-third of the fronds.

Heart's ease

This variable short-lived European perennial, known botanically as *Viola tricolor*, brings colour to shaded areas and a pretty harvest. While the leaves and young buds are edible, it's the flowers that are worth gathering, to add to salads and garnish bakes.

Chervil

Anthriscus cerefolium, an annual herb with feathery foliage, brings a uniquely delicious warmth to savoury dishes. Quickly raised from direct-sown seed. Though hailing from Southeast Europe, it is fully hardy. Produces frothy white flowers in summer, self-seeding happily.

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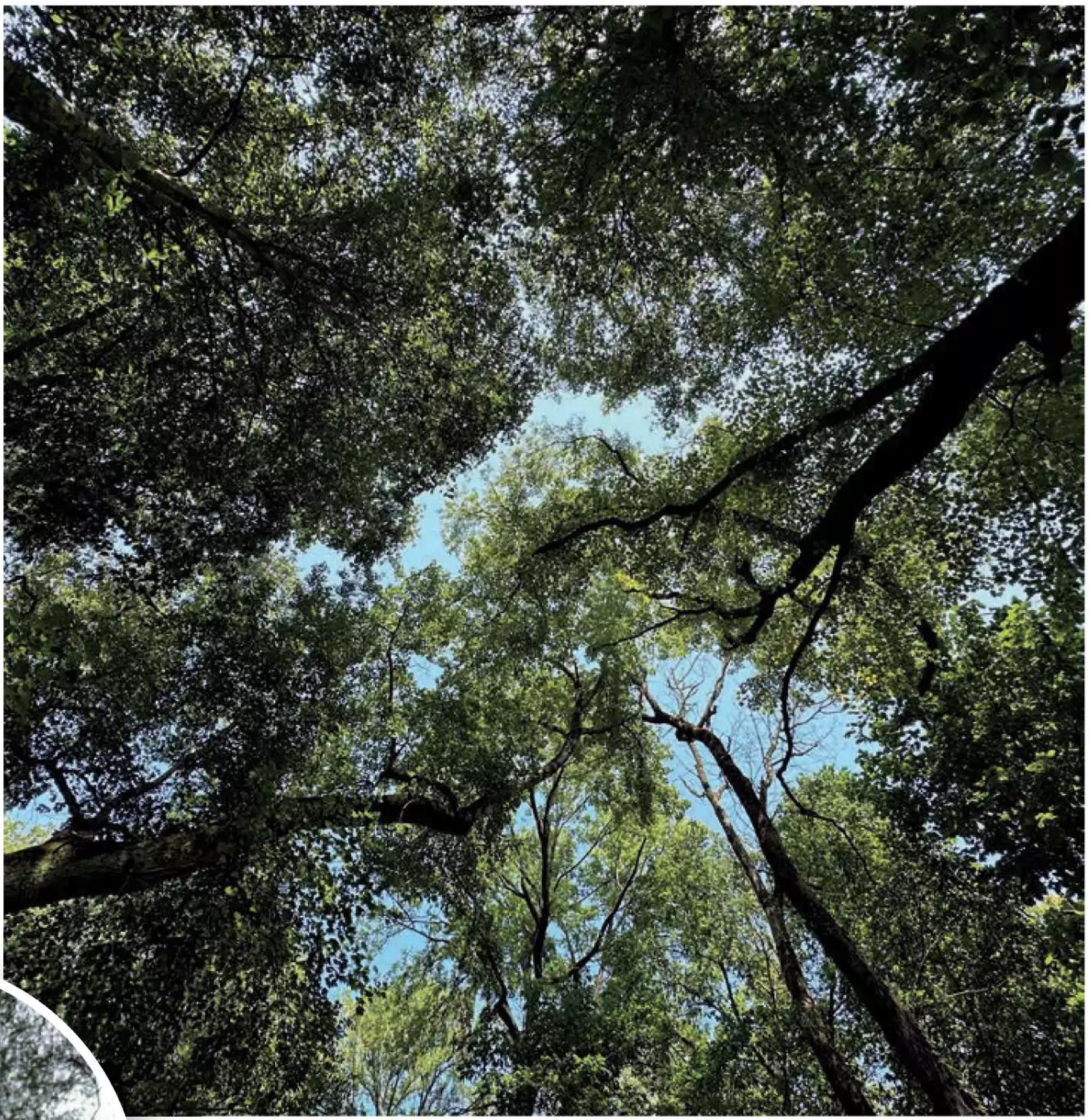
GARDENING AND WELLBEING

With **Ellen Mary**

Woodland wonder

Ellen Mary explains how to bathe in the goodness of late winter trees



Winter can be cold, wet and grey, with the wish that spring would arrive sooner rather than later in many of our minds. Hoping for spring is important, and natural, but winter will seem so much longer if we are unable to embrace it as it is.

Without winter, our landscapes would be very different and the impact on ecosystems would be huge. We can learn a great deal from the flora and fauna around us - how to flow with the seasons, how to be patient and persevere and, importantly, how living in the present moment brings a great sense of connection both with nature and ourselves.

We know the daffodils will soon bloom and the birds will nest again, but in the meantime, I recommend trying to 'be' in winter and enjoy the bare beauty it brings and allow yourself this time to rest and move at a slower pace.

If we allow ourselves to fully observe and truly see the landscape, even with the rain and snow, winter can be truly magical. The glisten of frost on berries and a raindrop splash in a puddle can all be observed mindfully for a close appreciation of the seasonal here and now. Wrapping up warm and getting outside in the natural world is so good for winter wellness, and there's no better place to immerse yourself than among winter trees.

Winter tree care

It's important to look after trees and if you have some in your garden, keeping them healthy over the winter months will help them to continue thriving through the wind, rain and snowy weather. This time of year is ideal for also adding new bare-root trees and shrubs, so for a cost-effective method to grow garden trees, it is well worth planting them now - you'll be able to enjoy these new additions with the promise of new growth to come!

The dormant state of trees during winter gives us a good opportunity to look at the shape and size of the tree and, for most deciduous species, to prune any dead, diseased or damaged branches. Make sure the ground around the tree is well drained, provide a mulch to protect the roots and leaving any fallen leaves surrounding it in situ now until spring to provide a home for invertebrates and help continue the cycle of soil replenishment.

Above: **Ellen explains how to connect with a woodland space and embrace its secrets**

All images unless otherwise credited: Ellen Mary

Get up close to fully appreciate the trees in your garden

hug trees
not people

Above: Indigenous communities have long understood the healing power of trees, so why not give one a hug?

How to tap into the well-being properties of trees

Of course a walk in the woods (or by trees) is enjoyable, but the concept of forest bathing (shinrin-yoku), originating in Japan, shines a light on the benefits of time spent surrounded by trees.

A walk around your garden (or in a nearby woods) offers a simple, yet effective and free green antidote to modern world pressures. The sounds of rustling leaves in the breeze, the smell of rain on the ground (known as 'petrichor') and even the cold air are all mood boosting and can help promote a sense of calm all round. Being surrounded by trees can also mean that we benefit from breathing in the anti-microbial phytoncides that are emitted by trees as a protection against pests and diseases. Some believe these natural woodland oils can help reduce cortisol (stress hormone) and decrease anxiety and do much more good besides. It's time to embrace winter in the garden or forest.

Forest bathing takes the idea of walking in the woods to whole new levels. It's about connecting with the space as much as anything, walking slowly, mindfully and being aware of the earth beneath your feet, the light between the leaves, the canopy above, the leaves below, a glistening cobweb on a branch or the birds in the trees.

You can then notice how your body feels within the woodland environment. Noticing is different to judging or changing how you feel; simply 'notice' the sensations in your body and stand or sit still for at least 15 minutes in this environment. Engage each of your senses individually for some time to calm your mind.

Maybe choose a woodland item to pick up, touch, smell and study closely. Accept the woodland invitations around you, they are everywhere! Perhaps the clouds are inviting you to stare at them, the moss is inviting a touch or a leaf is asking you to look closer. There are infinite invitations, learn to accept them and be in tune with the flow of the forest.

Consider getting closer still, and touching, smelling, observing and even hugging a tree. Contrary to the reputation of being a 'hippy' activity, indigenous communities have understood the healing power of trees for centuries and the Chipko Movement in India is best known for its village women who used tree hugging as a means to protect their forest from logging. Tree hugging is a wonderful way to connect, bring balance to your mind, body and soul while you're fully immersed in the magic of trees. Happy late winter!

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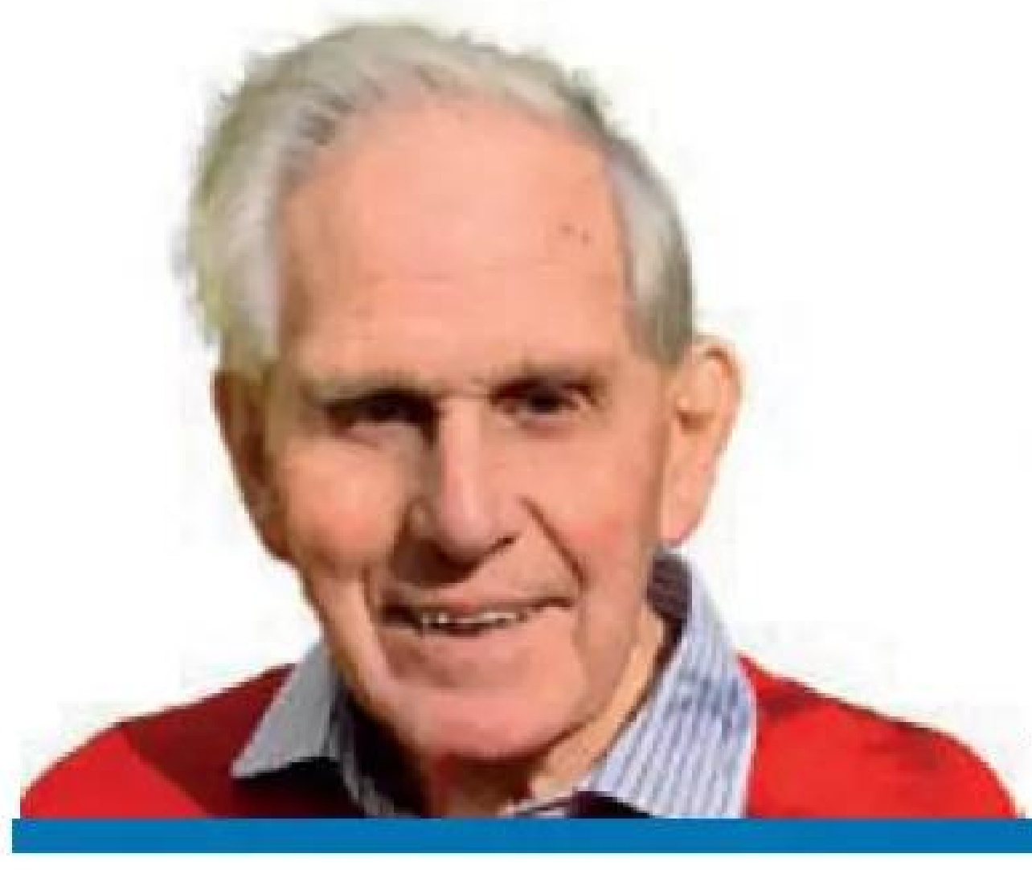


Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What grows well around roses?

Q I have just planted a new flower bed with bare root roses in full sun so that I can enjoy cutting flowers for the house. My father used to keep the soil around his roses free of plants so he could mulch and fertilise them easily. But I would prefer not to have bare soil around mine. Can you recommend any plants I could grow around the roses to complement but not compete with them?
Simon Eccles, Carrickfergus

Hardy *Geranium sanguineum* will cover bare soil around roses

A It's good to hear that you've planted a new rose bed and wish to associate your bushes with perennials. Pleasingly, there are many to choose from and the following will enrich your summer display:

Achillea 'Moonshine': Soft yellow flowers, greyish feathery foliage.
Agapanthus 'Peter Pan': Large clusters of tubular blue blossoms, rapier-like leaves.
Anthemis cupaniana: Bright white daisy blooms amid dense silvery leaves.
Astrantia 'Ruby Wedding': Dark red daisies on maroon stems.
Campanula 'Chettle Charm': Spires of blue and white bells.
Dianthus 'Old Square Eyes': Large single and highly scented flowers.
Geranium sanguineum var lancastriense: Dark green leaves, vivid pink blooms.
'Hidcote' lavender: Deep violet blue flowers beloved by bees.
Malva moschata f. *alba*:: Saucer-shaped silky white blooms.
Zauschneria californica 'Dublin': Commonly called humming bird trumpet, its massed tubular scarlet flowers make late summer and autumn special.

Plant when the soil is neither frozen nor waterlogged and keep your new plants well watered, but not overwatered, while they settle in.

Ideally, in spring, mulch your roses and perennials with composted manure and a granular rose fertiliser.

Thereafter, until late summer, feed your charges monthly with fertiliser.
What joy this display will bring you.

When should I trim ornamental grasses?

Q I have carex and other ornamental grasses growing around the garden in pots and borders but am unsure how to look after them. Some look like they have died back. Do they need pruning?
Mike Clark, Devon

A Provided the carex and other ornamental grasses are still appealing, leave them intact. Indeed, carex can be left to spread as its leaves rarely discolour and die. Only when they do, should you shorten them to within a few inches from the base to encourage fresh foliage.

I suggest that you encourage robust growth by sprinkling a balanced fertiliser, such as Vitax Q4, over the root area.

Start in April and continue monthly until September, watering it in at every application.

As for your other grasses whose foliage has died back over winter, shorten them to within a few inches of the base in April, or when new leaves are emerging.

Above: Trim grasses in spring to make room for new growth

Quick questions & answers

Phlox hate being overwatered

Why did rock phlox fail?

Q Last year I added several rockery phlox plants to the garden, hoping for a good display. Sadly they haven't grown as I hoped - some died and the rest didn't flourish. What went wrong?
Sally Pearson (via email)

A I am sorry that the rock garden phlox plants have failed to grow as expected. I am wondering if they are waterlogged – we have had so much rain over the past few months.

This plant needs fertile, free-draining soil. If your ground is heavy and the water table has risen to an unacceptable level, roots may die.

I suggest that you mulch your charges with grit and work it into the soil around them to improve drainage.

How to help a leggy skimmia

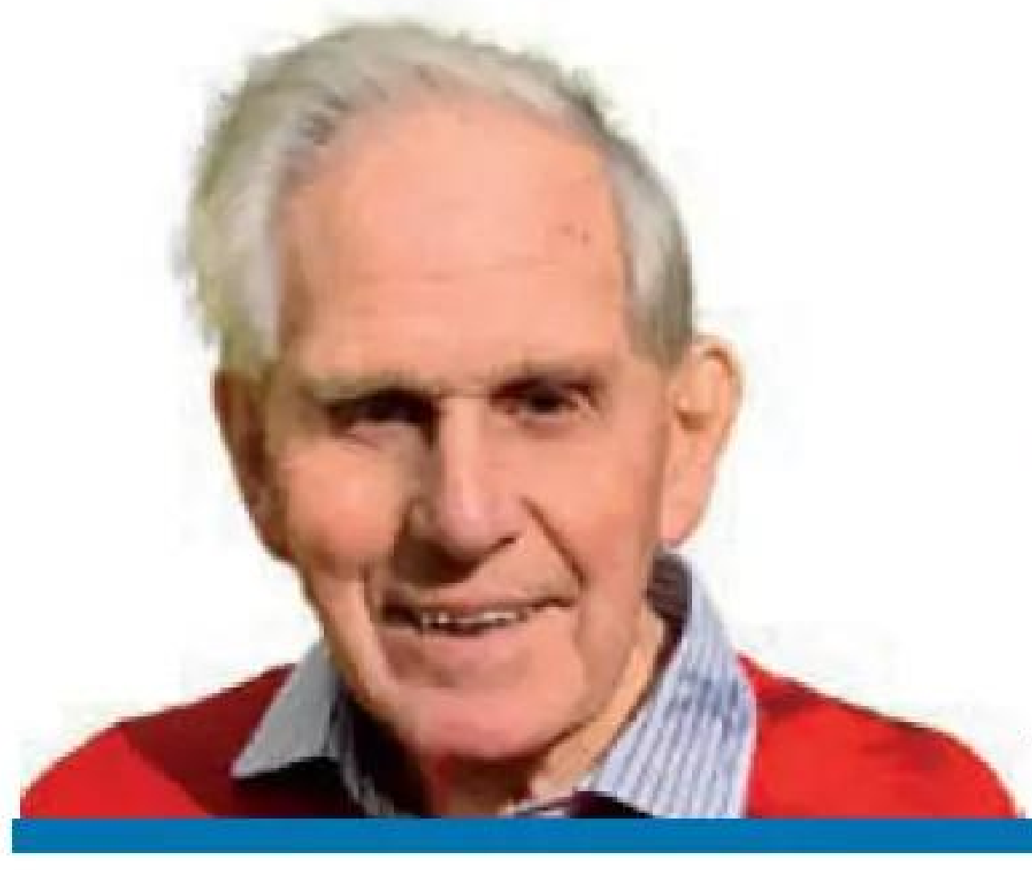
Q We have a potted skimmia that is doing well but has little growth low down and looks rather leggy. How can I encourage bushier growth?
Mike Brookes (via email)

A The best way to encourage your potted leggy skimmia to produce more shoots lower down is to make a small notch just above a stem joint where the 'trunk' is bare.

Additionally, in mid-April, shorten branches by a third to stimulate new growth.

I also urge you to feed it monthly, from April to September. with Vitax Q4 to initiate new shoots.

Right: Notch the trunk for bushier skimmias



Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How do we keep a magnolia happy?

Magnolia soulangeana needs acidic soil to perform best

Q Our *Magnolia soulangeana* didn't do well in our soil, but has started to thrive since we moved it to a pot of ericaceous compost. How else can we help it to live well and flower?

Ali and Tom Marshall (via email)

A I am delighted that you have resolved the problem of your *Magnolia soulangeana* failing to prosper.

It definitely prefers lime-free ericaceous compost, but as it normally grows to about 6m (20ft) in height and width, it would unfortunately be happier planted in a border.

If, however, it is impracticable to do so and the only way to enjoy it is to containerise it, its roots will be severely constricted. As a result, your magnolia will develop slowly and is unlikely to grow to more than about 2-2.5m (6-8ft) high but will still delight you with its glorious blooms.

To keep it happy, make sure the compost is kept damp in dry spells, using harvested rainwater or tap water that has been left standing for 24 hours. Liquid-feed it weekly between April and September, with a high-potash tomato fertiliser to encourage a profusion of blossom.

Additionally, raise the pot on 'feet' to ensure that surplus moisture freely drains away,

Can we remedy our overpruning?

Above: Prune plums in summer when they are safer from silver leaf disease

Q We overpruned our plum trees, which we inherited when we moved to this house, and they now look rather ugly and spiky. How can we remedy this and will they still fruit?

Alan Henderson (via email)

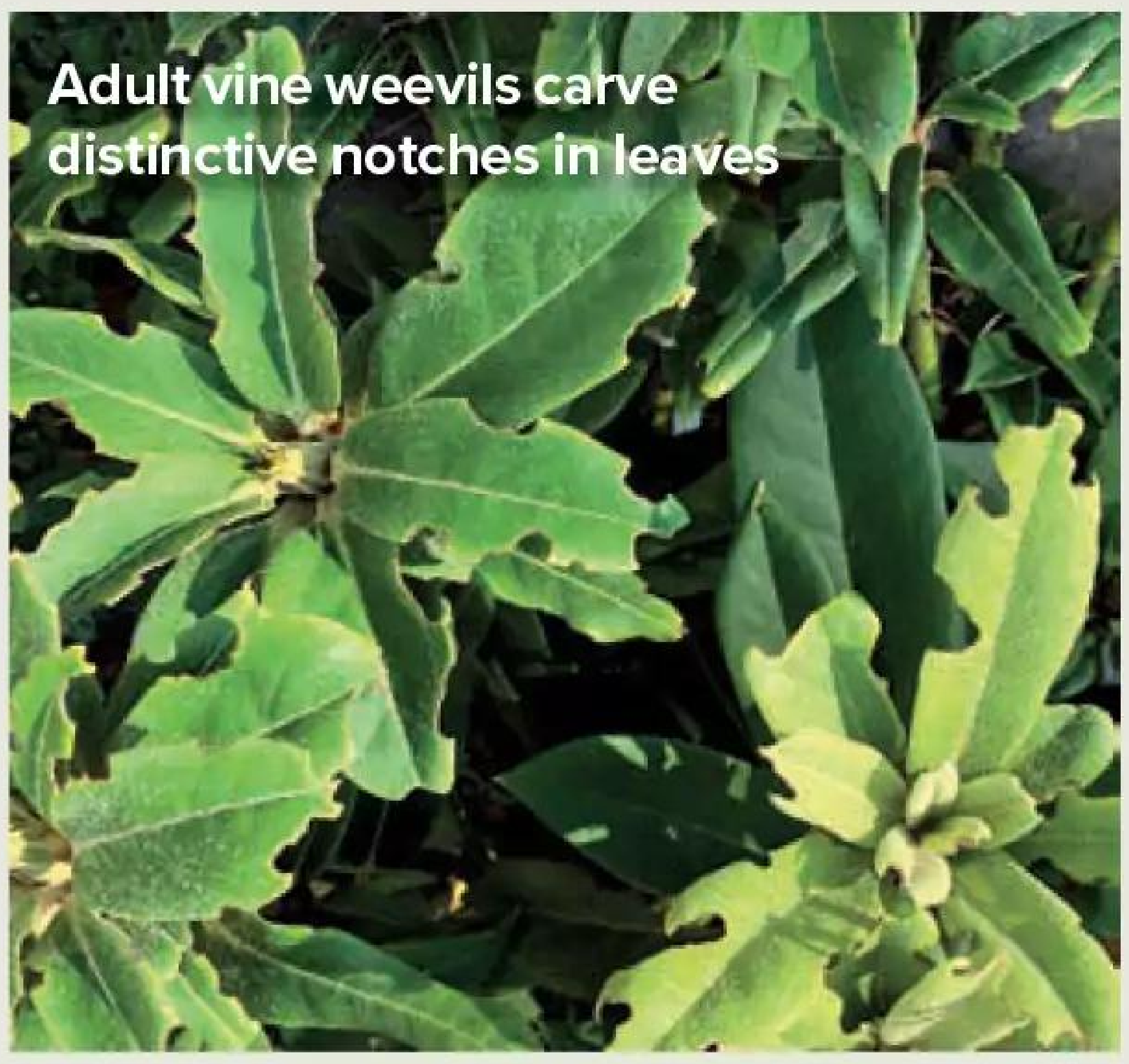
A I suggest that in July you thin the crowding water shoots (the 'spiky' growth) by either removing them completely or cutting them back to seven leaves. Ideally leave them 10-15cm (4-6in) apart.

This will help to improve air circulation through the branches and reduce risk of disease spores alighting upon the foliage.

Additionally, thin crowding shoots from the middle of the tree. This will let more light get to all the branches which will encourage beautiful spring blossom and generous fruit crops.

Never prune plums or cherries in winter when silver leaf spores are at their most active and more liable to infect cuts, for this disease can debilitate or kill the tree.

Quick questions & answers



Adult vine weevils carve distinctive notches in leaves

What has been chewing our shrubs?

Q Some of our potted shrubs have been attacked by something, and the leaves eaten. Please can you identify the culprit?.

Tim Middlemore, Cardiff

A I fear that your shrubs have been 'notched' by vine weevil, a pest whose adults chew semi-circular pieces from leaf margins and whose grubs devour roots.

The best way to control this pest is to tackle it with a natural solution such as nematodes. Apply a produce such as Nemasys in spring, when the soil temperature is above 5C, or in autumn, when grubs are at their most destructive.

It's available from larger garden centres or from Green Gardener at 01493 750061 or www.greengardener.co.uk.

Can you name this shrub?

Q Could you please identify the shrub from the attached photograph?

Simon Scott, West Midlands

A The mystery shrub appears to be *Indigofera amblyantha* or indigo shrub.

Happiest when planted against a warm, south-facing wall, it flowers freely from late spring to summer. It was introduced from China by William Purdom in 1908.

Left: Indigo shrubs like a warm, sunny spot

Snowdrops are best planted in the green

How can I get snowdrops to grow well?

Q Please can someone help me to grow snowdrops? I have tried several times but never have any success and it's so frustrating, especially at this time of year when everyone else's look like they are flourishing!
Sofia Barker (via email)

A I am sorry that your snowdrops are failing to flourish. I am wondering if you are planting them as bulbs in autumn, or as plants in the spring, when they are growing strongly.

Planting 'in the green' as it is called, is the most reliable way to ensure that they establish well.

Snowdrop plants are usually widely available at this time of year and all you have to do is plant them at the same depth as they have been growing, then let them flower and die back.

Leave the leaves intact so they wither away naturally and feed the bulbs so they perform well next year.

Normally, if bulbs are well developed and packed with energy, they bloom well and make robust clumps.

Occasionally, however, if bulbs are old and possibly desiccated, they seldom prosper. Snowdrop bulbs are also a favourite with squirrels that will dig them up and eat them.

If you have tried both methods – bulbs and 'in the green' – the site chosen may be unsuitable: it dries out excessively in summer or is waterlogged in winter or spring.

How can we resurrect our elderly rhubarb?

Q We have had years of good crops from our rhubarb, but it's starting to tail off and the stems are weak and thin. How can we revive it or should we start again?
Pauline Barrack, Worcestershire

A I am sorry that your once chunky-stemmed rhubarb has deteriorated and stems are now thin and lanky.

I suspect that it is hungry and needs dividing and replanting in soil enriched with composted manure. It also needs a sunny open situation.

The best time to do this is late March or April when the soil is warming and conducive to robust growth.

Ideally, use a strong, sharp knife or spade to split the clump into well-budded portions, replanting them at the same depth at which they were previously growing. You can compost the old woody heart of the plant.

Finish by watering in and mulching the divisions thickly with composted manure.

Pull just a few stems from each clump in the first year to help your charges grow strongly and establish quickly.

Left: Rhubarb needs dividing to keep it fruitful

Quick questions & answers

Marrows and courgettes like a sunny spot with fertile soil

The best way to grow marrows

Q What is the best way to grow courgettes and marrows?
Zoe haines (via email)

A If you are starting from seed, sow undercover in early May so your plants are ready to go into the garden in early summer.

They like a warm, sunny, fertile and free-draining site that has been enriched before planting with plenty of well-rotted compost or manure.

Alternatively, plug plants are also widely available and they can be planted out in May or June when the frosts have finished.

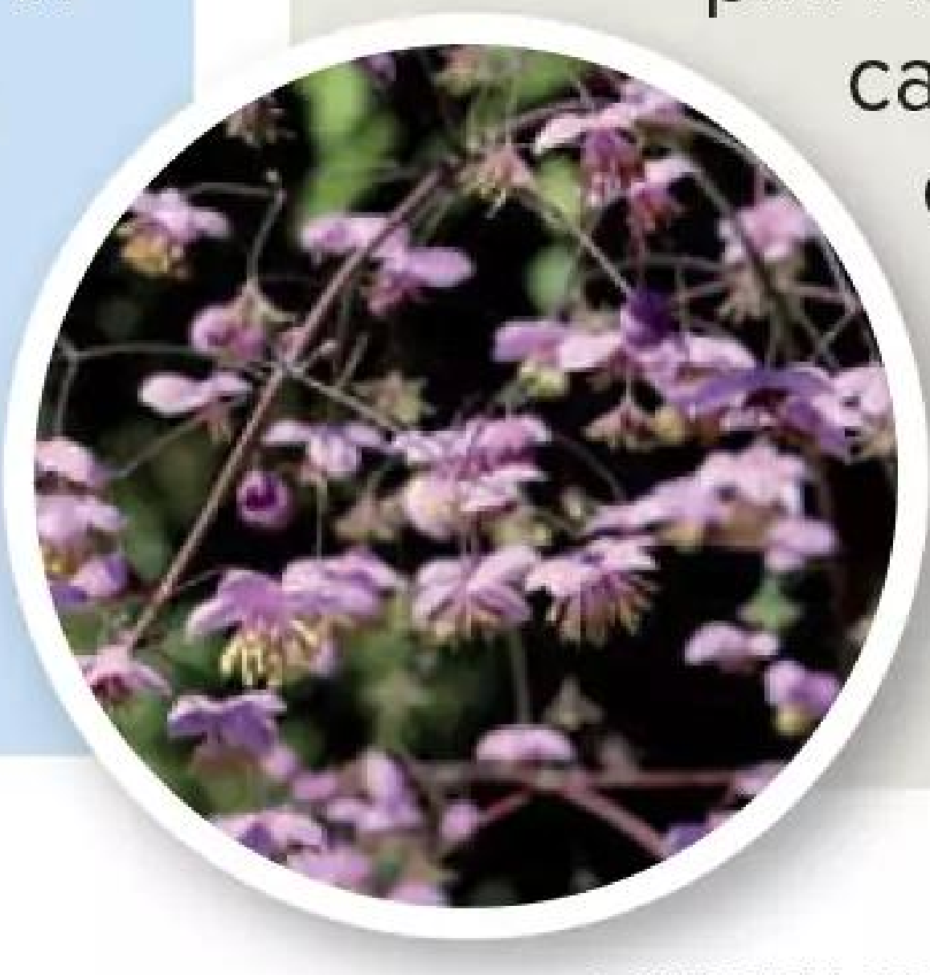
A pretty groundcover plant

Q Please can you help me identify this plant. It was a present from a neighbour and she can't name it either!
Margaret Hodgsom, Surrey

A The plant in question is *Thalictrum kiusianum* or meadow rue.

A native of Japan and Korea, its ferny-leaved stems spread rapidly in sun or shade. It's also a drought resister.

Bearing clouds of tiny lavender-pink flowers in summer, it's a captivating contender for cool, damp spots.


Left: Meadow rue is an easy-going plant

Your LETTERS TO KIM

Amateur GARDENING
2 FREE PACKETS OF SEEDS
SUNNY IDEAS!

Your lovely letters, emails and social media posts continue to flow in beautifully. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

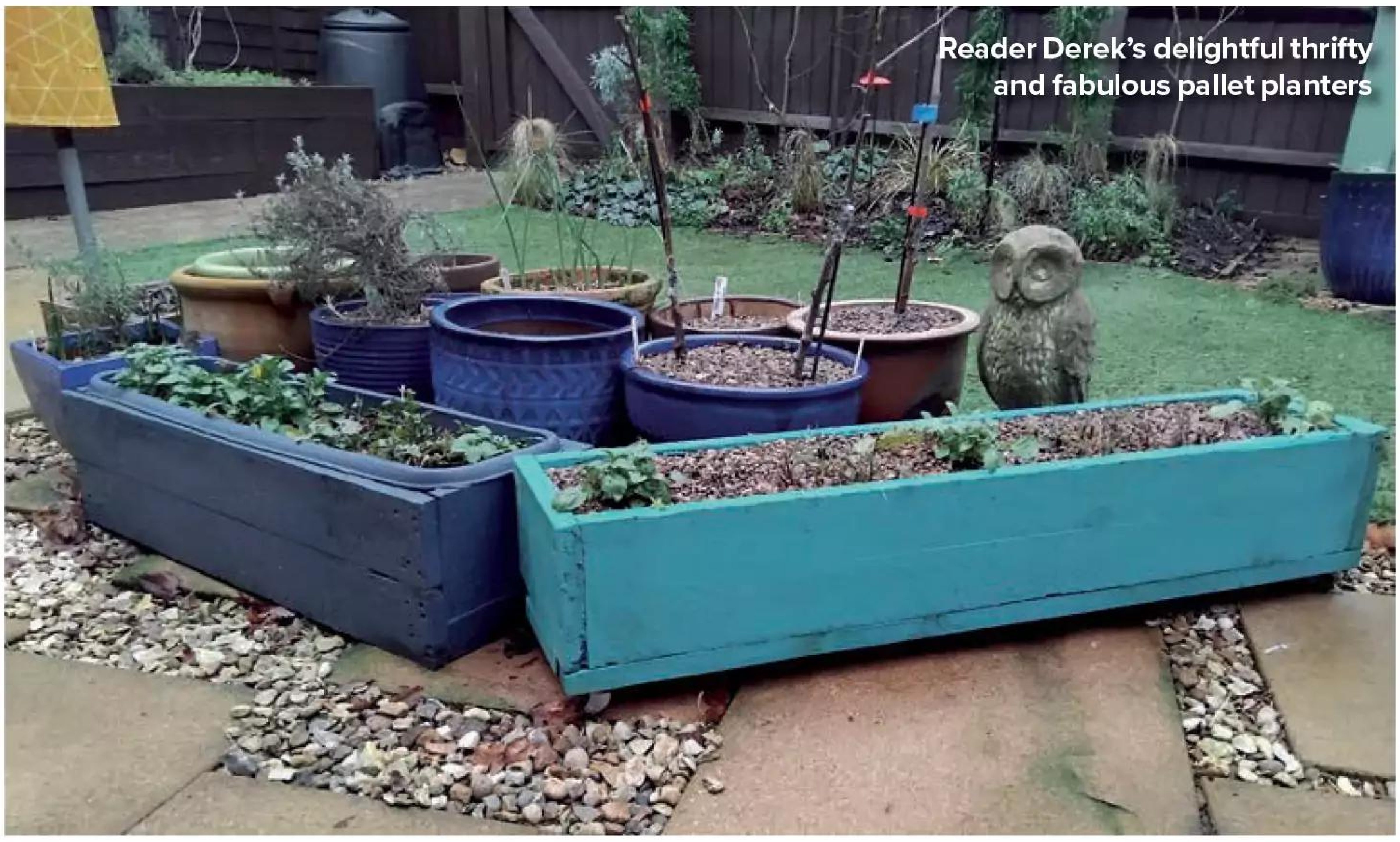
Money-saving inspiration

Hello everyone,
I thought you would like to see what I made from old pallets last summer, I painted them with leftover paint. The troughs were split old ones and the screws were old ones too, so no expense.

Yours
Derek (Quarterman) of Banbury.

PS keep up the great news.

Kim says; thank you for sharing this brilliant creative idea Derek. They are so jolly, and especially so given they were entirely free to make. Very inspiring indeed!



Reader Derek's delightful thrifty and fabulous pallet planters

---

Reader Gwynneth especially enjoyed the slower seed advice by columnist Mike Palmer earlier this year

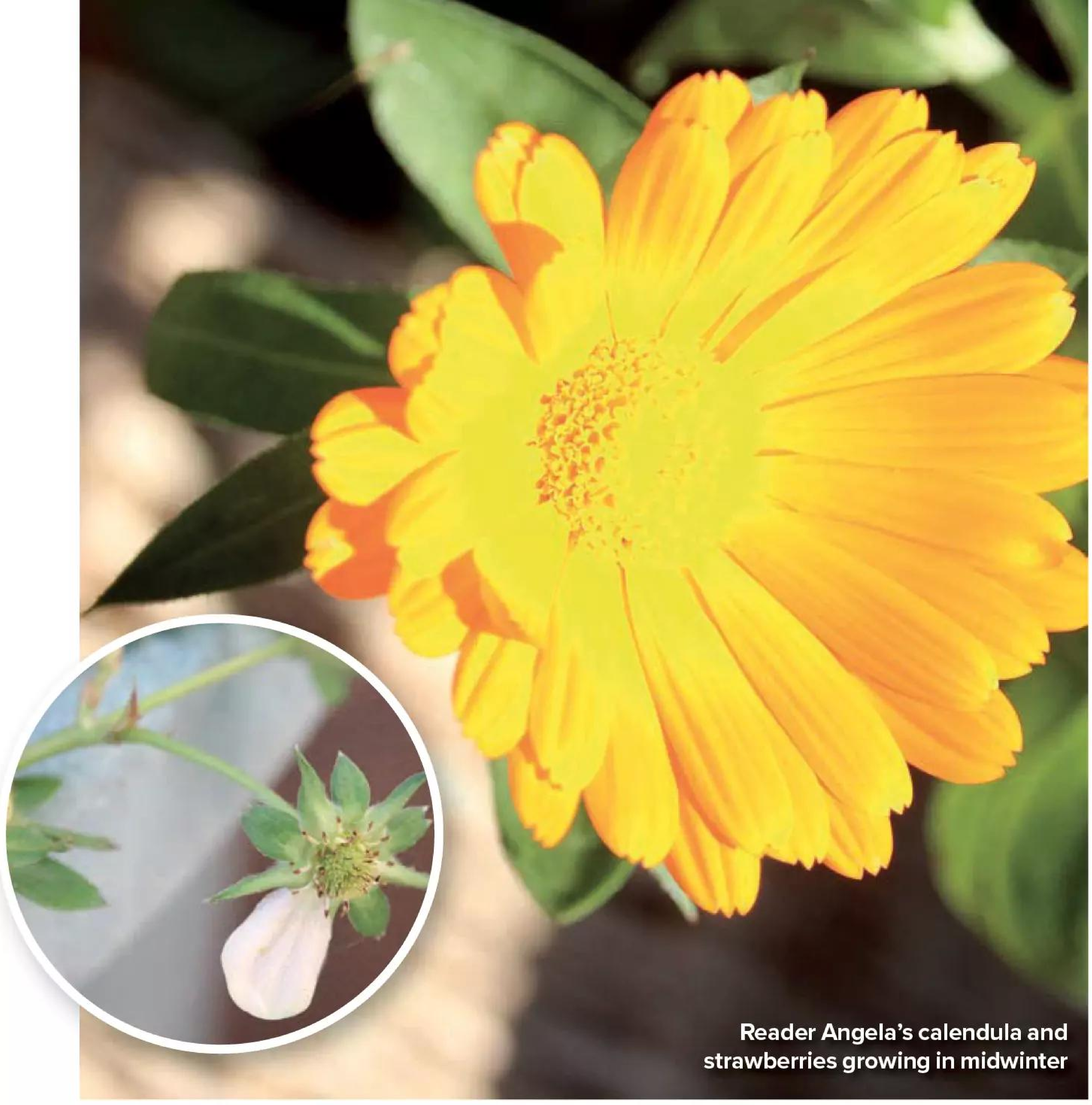
Slower start to seed sowing

Dear Amateur Gardening magazine,
I would just like to especially thank you for the two articles that you had in the 11th January issue which I received on Saturday the 4th of January. [I've taken out a 12 month subscription]

Ruth Hayes on starting off sweet pea seeds in January, I too have been collecting loo rolls so will be doing my sowing this next week. But even more interesting was the advice given by Mike Palmer on sowing early seeds. I was all set to start the new year [resolutions] planting up several trays of seeds to give them a good start in the greenhouse, but after Mike's advice I can now relax and start them later in March/April and not feel I've missed the boat!

Many thanks for all the great advice.
Gwynneth Jones

Kim says; that is lovely to hear Gwynneth. It's good to enjoy winter at a slower pace and not feel too pressured. Thank you for writing in. That's great to hear about the new subscription so you get the magazine guaranteed each month.



Reader Angela's calendula and strawberries growing in midwinter

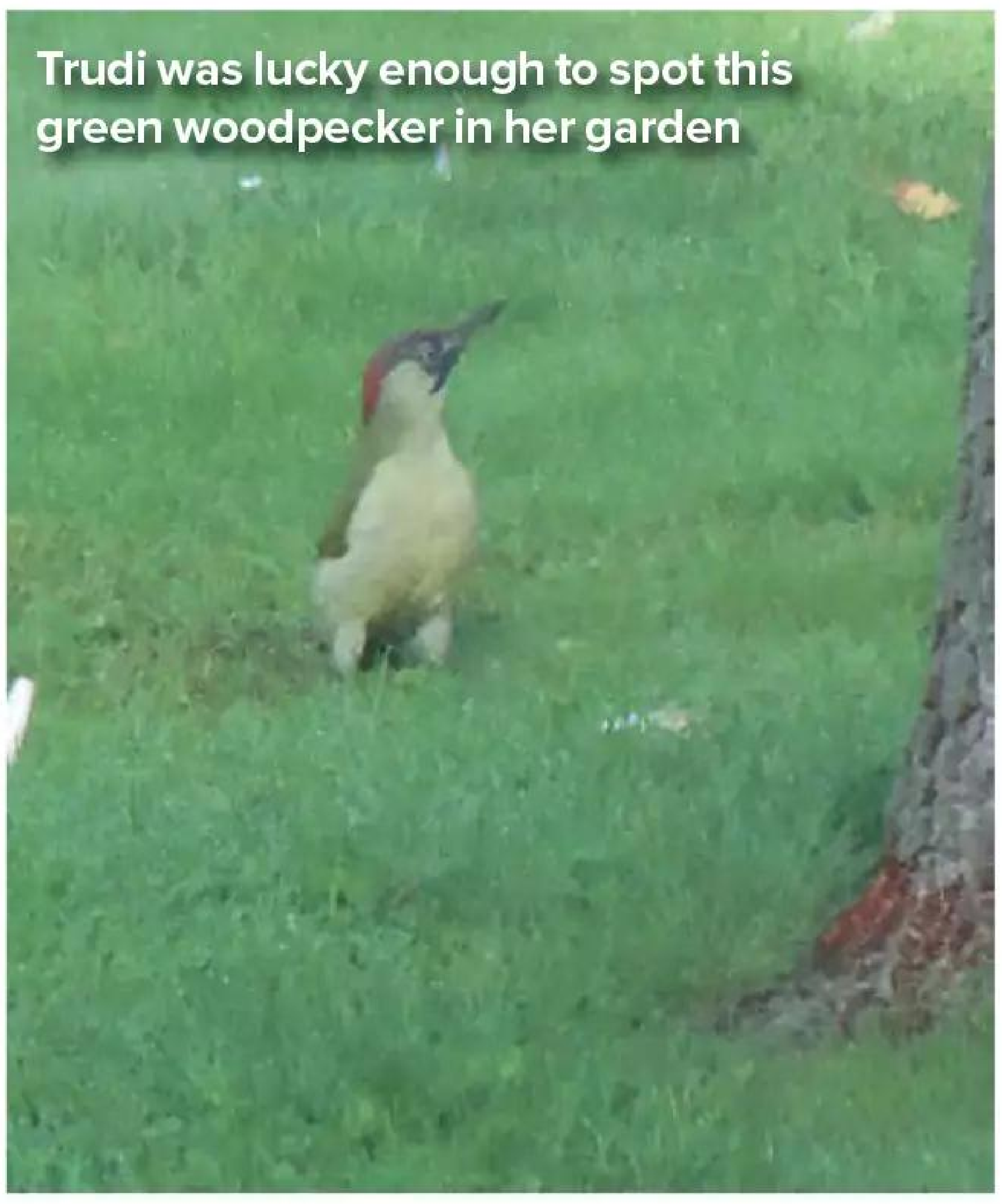
Nature is confused!

Dear Kim,
Over winter, including Christmas and the new year, I have had lots of colour on my patio. For example, my calendula. At Christmas I had white flowers on my strawberry plant and in January I noticed little strawberries. I have never had this before and it made me wonder what could have pollinated them. Whatever the reason, it was a treat to see them flower this winter.

From
Angela Keeler, Suffolk

Kim says; goodness, yes, the natural world has been very confused the past few months with the erratic weather. I have a few strawberry plants with white fruits in one of my polytunnels and some of the self-seeding poppies started springing up in December and are still trying to hold on.

What other experiences have readers had of unseasonal plant growth due to climate change? Please do write in and share.



Trudi was lucky enough to spot this green woodpecker in her garden

Wonderful green woodpecker

Dear Kim,
After reading Belinda Robson's letter (11th Jan issue) requesting more wildflower seeds, I too would love to see more native seeds please. They are so beneficial to wildlife and it might encourage more gardeners to try them.

Having liked the photo of a woodpecker visiting your garden, I thought you may like to see this beautiful green woodpecker that I was lucky enough to see digging about in my lawn.

Kind regards
Trudi Wynn, Selby

Kim says; what a joy to see! We love our garden birds all year round but seeing them during the winter months especially brings so much joy. Thank you for sharing this with us Trudi.

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Calendar 2025
coast
Calendar 2025

Poetry corner

The Garden

Winter touched me today, rendering me stilled and quieter
for a time; less productive, less growth, less greening

And as the sun rose, dimly warm and gently glowing, its
misted orange fire alight but with its power fading, winter
held me close and tight, its chill embrace invading every
stone, every blade of grass while I watched with dying
eyes as my former glory passed

The red, the green, the gold were turning brown and old
and seared, and with frost upon my body, I now knew that
death was near.

I passed peacefully away and the branches of the tree
standing in its quiet corner bent to cover me and shed a
winding sheet of leaves upon my earth, while its buds and
roots silently awaited rebirth

The robin sings a requiem mass for me

The hedgehog hides himself and sleeps for he has his bed
at the back of the compost heap, where the soil is rich and
very fertile, but, like me, at rest now for a while

For just a few short weeks I shall remain like this, then,
having rested, I shall waken to the gentle kiss of
snowdrops on my face; and then from where the seeds
have lain with me, I shall grow on again.

Jenny Proom, Devon

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

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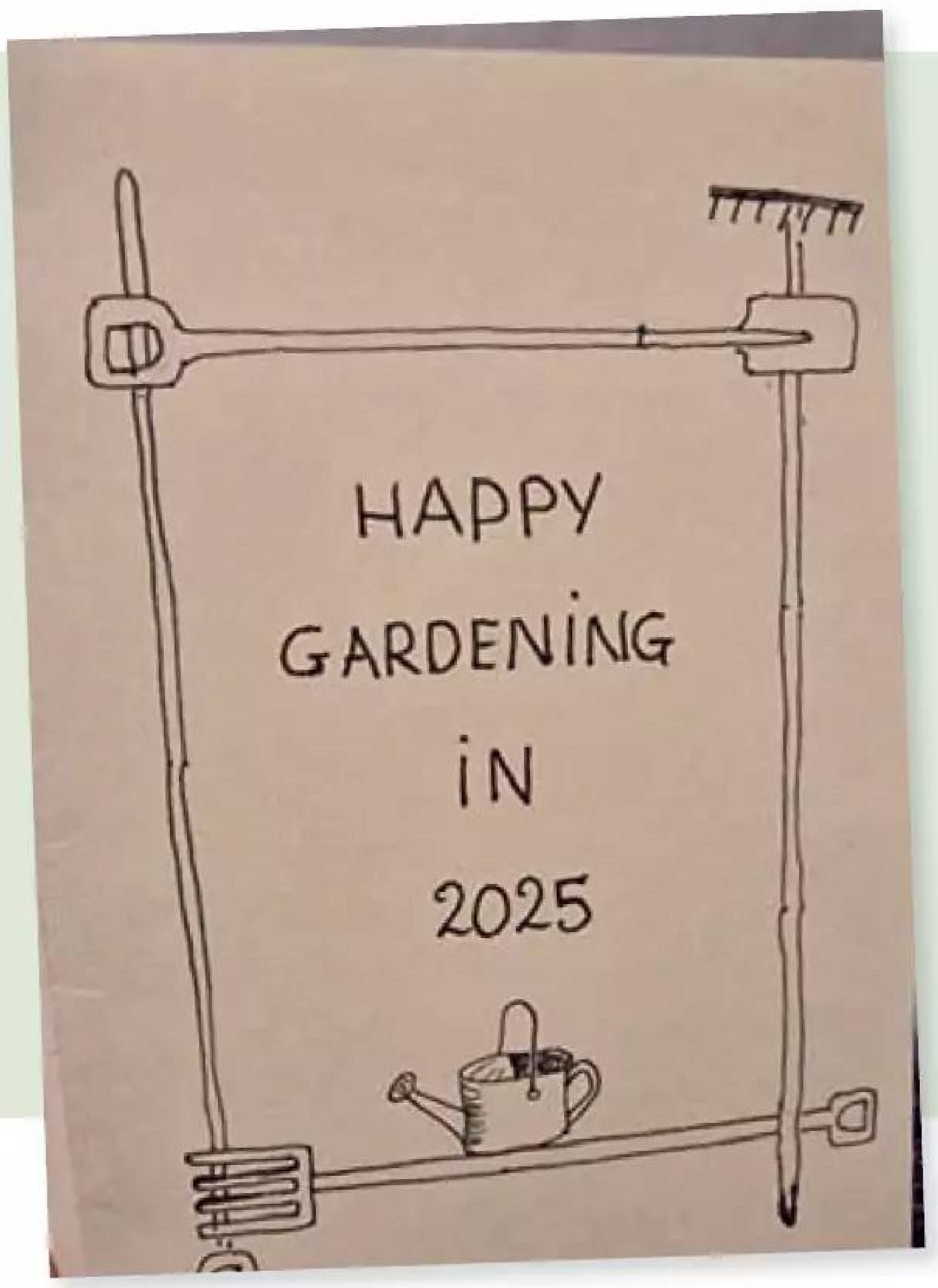
72 IDEAS!

Clever card

David Whitmore, Swindon

Kim says; David your card was so joyful to open, and what a clever design, thank you. You made us all smile and feel warm inside.



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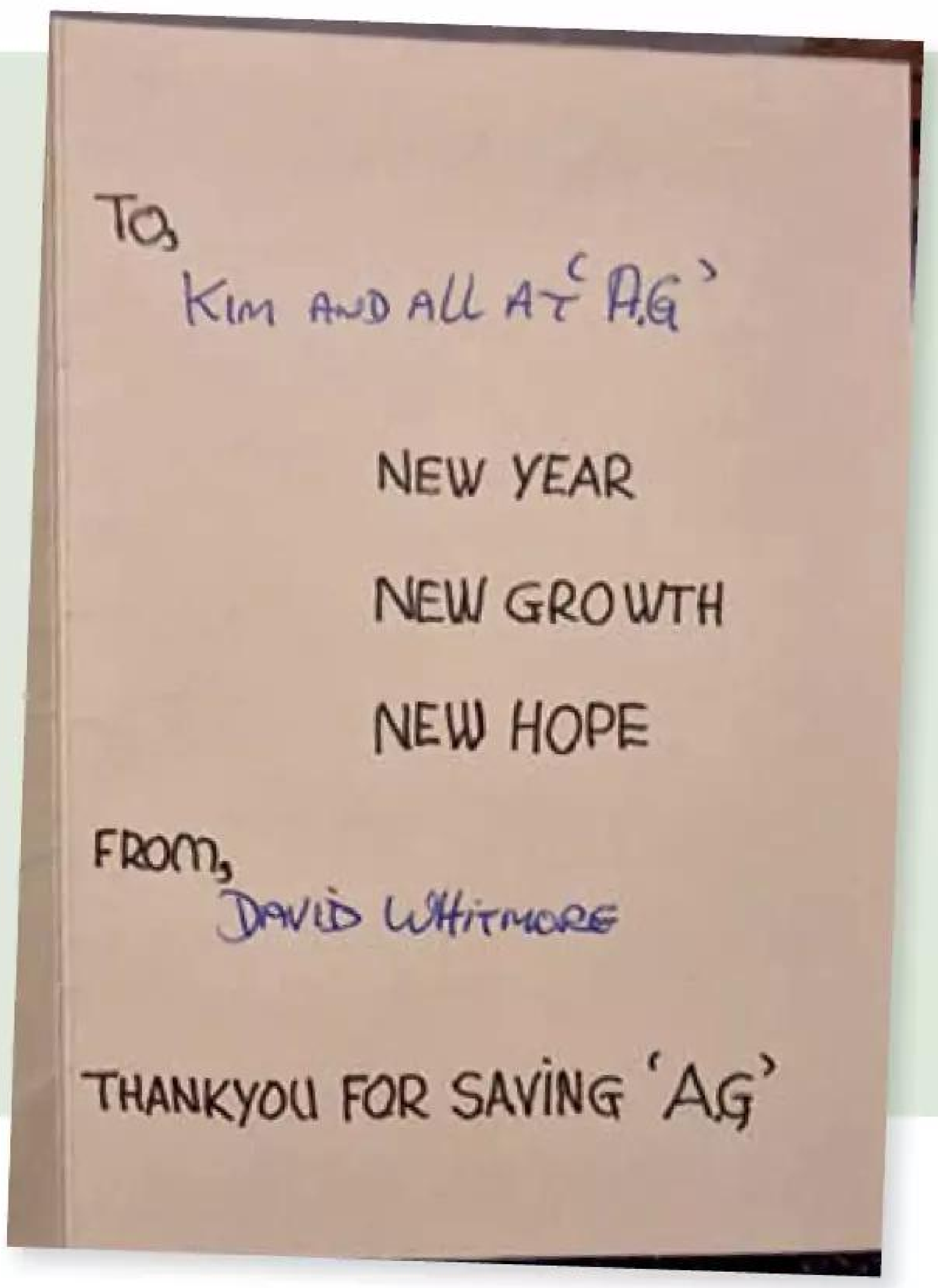
2025



To,
Kim AND All AT 'AG'

NEW YEAR
NEW GROWTH
NEW HOPE

FROM,
DAVID WHITMORE

THANKYOU FOR SAVING 'AG'

GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**, AG's gardening expert

Sow your own summer firework display

Grow this for eye-catching colour and nutritious greens

Well here's an absolute bobbydazzler of a plant to start the month! Not only will it bring a firework display of exuberant colour to your garden, but it's edible as well.

Amaranthus tricolor 'Joseph's Coat' is a bushy, upright annual plant that can also be grown as a short-lived perennial if moved undercover during the colder months.

As it grows, reaching around 60cm (22ft) in height and 40cm (1.5ft) wide, it forms green and dark purple or brown lower leaves and a spray of dazzling yellow and red upper leaves - which is why it's named after Joseph's technicolour dreamcoat!

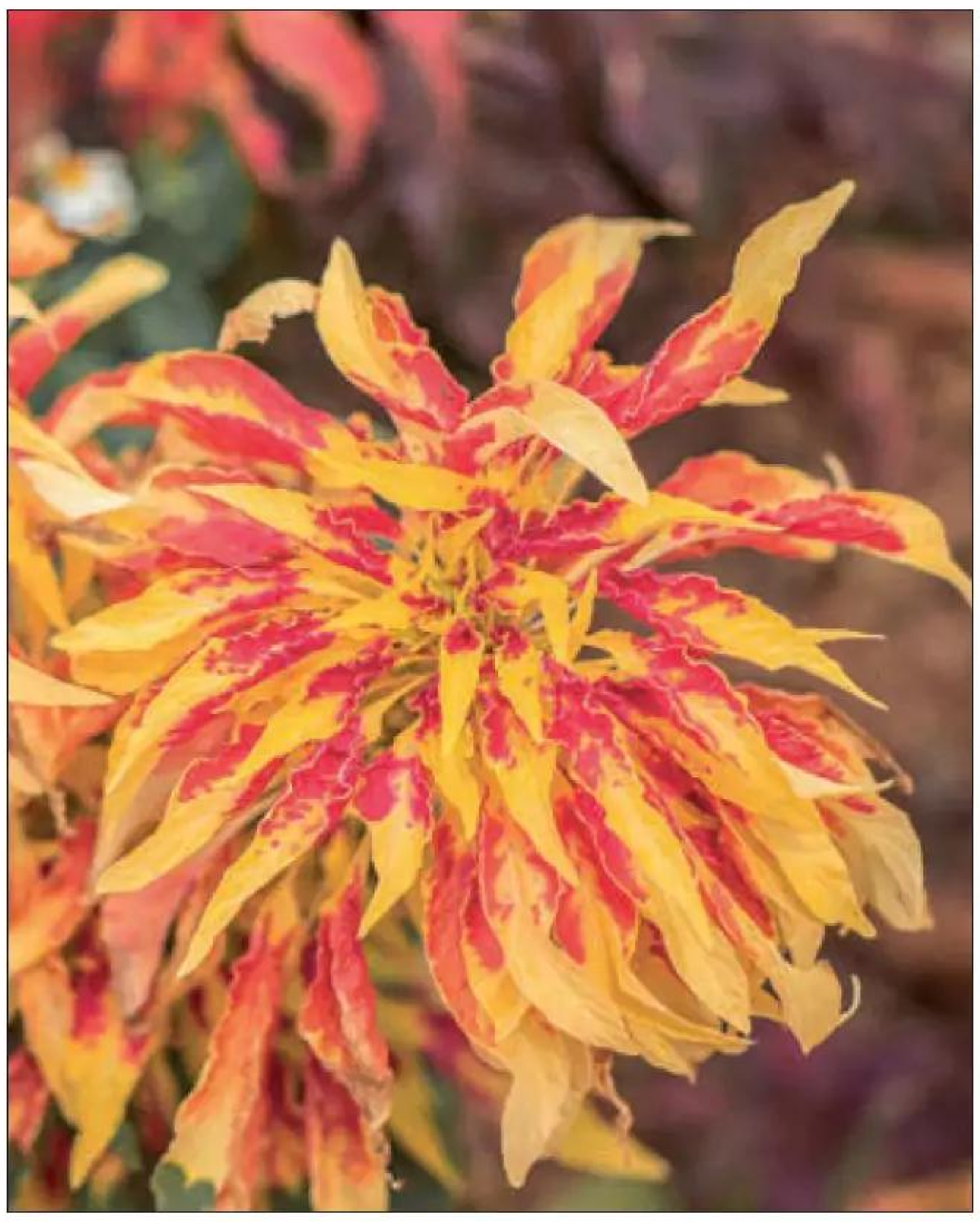
Despite its dramatic appearance, 'Joseph's Coat' is relatively easy-going, happily growing in most soils and situations, though you will get better colour if it's planted in a sunny spot, as shade may dull its tones.

Sow the seeds in trays or pots of good quality seed compost that has been dampened and tamped flat to provide a firm seedbed.

Scatter the seeds thinly and cover with a thin layer of compost or vermiculite before adding a lid to your seed trap or sealing the pot in a clear plastic bag.

With warmth and good light, seedlings will soon appear and can be pricked out and potted on individually when they are large enough to handle safely. Add your plants to the garden in late spring or early summer when they have been hardened off.

As well as providing a burst of colour, the leaves of amaranth, which is also known as callaloo and summer poinsettia, are edible and can be steamed when tender and young and used as a green leafy veg, or in salads.



Above: *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Joseph's Coat' is a colourful ornamental edible

© Shutterstock

A cheery annual

- Who doesn't like a daisy, especially when it's a sturdy and reliable bloomer in shades of mauve, pink and white?
- *Brachyscome iberidifolia* 'Bravo Mixed' is an absolute gem to add to the garden, the perfect long-lasting bedding plant that behaves well in containers as well as in the ground.
- Also known as 'Swan River daisy', the flowers of this half-hardy annual have black centres from which the petals fan out in the traditional daisy shape.
- Although they are grown as annuals, you may be able to pot them up and overwinter them in frost-free conditions.
- It is still far too cold to sow brachyscomes directly into the soil, but this month and next you can start them undercover in trays or pots of dampened seed compost.
- Germination usually takes two-three weeks and once the seedlings are robust enough you can carefully pot them on individually and grow them until they are large enough to acclimatise to the great outside world, and plant out.
- They will do best in a sunny spot with fertile, free-draining soil, and regular deadheading will see them flower right through until autumn.

Brachyscome will grow well in pots and borders

What's On

5 Feb: Elworthy Cottage Snowdrop Garden Opening: Elworthy Cottage, Elworthy, Taunton, Somerset. TA4 3PX. 11am-4.30pm.

7-9 Feb: Wye Valley Sculpture Garden Snowdrop Days, The Wye Valley Sculpture Garden, The Nurtons, Tintern, Brockweir, Monmouthshire, NP16 7NX. 1-4pm.

8 Feb: The West Yorkshire Organic Group Potato Day, Exhibition Building, Shipley College, Exhibition Road, Saltaire, BD18 3JW. Tubers 20p each, bring a bag. 10am-2pm.

8-9 Feb: Colesbourne Park Snowdrop Gardens Open Day, Colesbourne Park, Colesbourne, Near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL53 9NP. 1-4pm.

8 Feb: Kenilworth Potato Day & Seed Swap, Large Church Hall at St John the Evangelist, 205 Warwick Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, West Midlands, CV8 1HY. 10am-2pm.

8 Feb: South East Essex Organic Gardeners' Potato Day, Trust Links House, College Gardens, Rochford, Essex, SS4 1YL. 11am-2pm.

8 Feb: East Anglia Potato Day, Suffolk Rural (Otley) College, Charity Lane, Suffolk, IP6 9NE.

8 Feb: Shropshire Potato Day, Wattlesborough and Half Way House Village Hall, Heath Drive, Wattlesborough, Shropshire, West Midlands, SY5 9DX. 9am-2pm.

8 Feb: Monmouth Seed Swap, Bridges Centre, Drybridge Park, Monmouth, Wales, NP25 5AS. Details from cherry.taylor@dynamicmarkets.co.uk.

8 Feb: Lostwithiel Seed Swap, Lostwithiel Community Centre, Pleyber Christ Way, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, PL22 0HE.

9 Feb: Shaftesbury Snowdrops Best in the West Plant Sale and Snowdrop Artisan Market, Shaftesbury High Street, High Street, Shaftesbury, Dorset, SP7 8LY. 10am-3pm.

11 Feb: Edible Garden Seed Swap, The Heatons Library, Thornfield Road, Heaton Moor, Stockport, Greater Manchester, SK4 3LD. 10.30am-22.30pm.

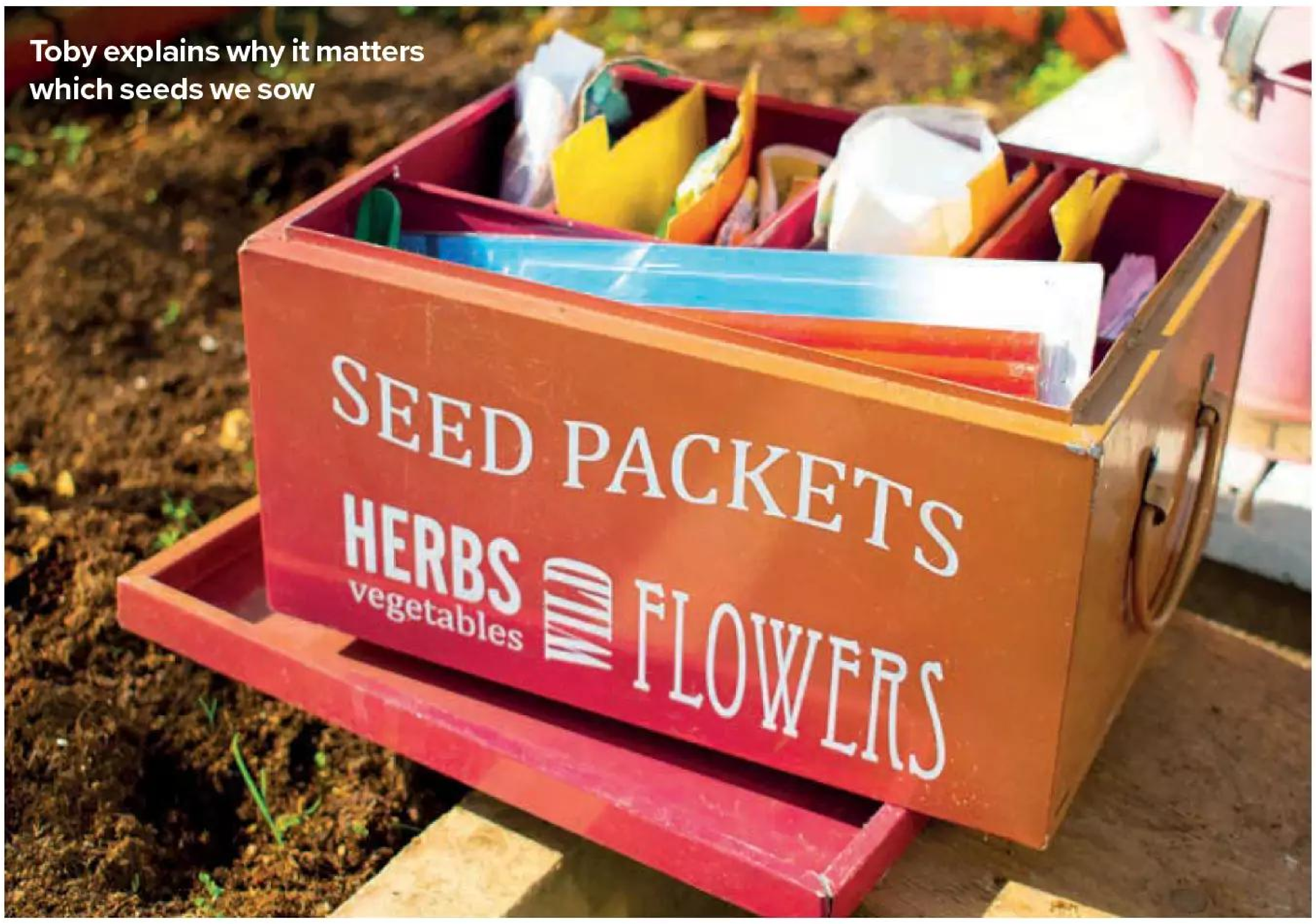
15 Feb: Mold Potato Day, Daniel Owen Centre, Earl Road, Mold, Flintshire, Wales, CH7 1AP. 9am-1pm

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

TOBY'S TALKING
SEED SOVEREIGNTY

Variety is the spice of life

Why it pays to be quick with seed buying, but know what you're growing



Toby explains why it matters which seeds we sow

© Shutterstock

When Greek philosopher (and all-round clever clogs) Aristotle observed that 'Nature hates a vacuum', he was referring to Mother Nature's endless capacity to fill empty spaces with life.

But he could have been talking about gardeners, as we have a similar, if sometimes competing, ambition. When empty pots or borders come up for grabs, we're in a footrace to fill 'em, before Mother Nature's wildlings lay their claim.

As regular readers will know, I have a new kitchen garden project with borders that have more gaps than a picket fence. This means that most of my time is spent mulching the bare earth before the (weed) growing season starts in earnest.

The rest is spent looking through lists and working out what I'm going to sow and grow in the empty spaces.

Seed catalogues these days look like books, with perfectly bound glossy paper and sumptuous pictures that help sell the sizzle of what might grow. They are a vast improvement on the dry, text-heavy catalogues of old in every respect bar one... they contain far fewer vegetable varieties than the historic catalogues.

Go back 100 years and there were many more carrot, cabbage, radish, parsnip and potato types than there are today. The reason for this decline in part is because many of the large seed companies have amalgamated, rationalising their lists and removing open-pollinated (see below) local seed strains that didn't suit the mass market. Then there's the cost of regulatory requirements that ensure the seed 'does what it says on the pack, which have made the upkeep of niche varieties harder to manage.

© Shutterstock

Toby recommends being quick with seed potato buying

Vanishing potato varieties

Before 2021, the UK had a healthy and diverse collection of farmers who specialised in small-scale seed-potato production. This meant that rare varieties kept going because as well as our domestic market of specialist seed suppliers and potato days, there was the world's largest single market that multiplied demand many times over.

Then that thing with the EU happened and a) yes, I know the 'benefits' will still start flooding in and b) we are not talking politics, we are talking potatoes instead. But..... in the small print of the deal was an EU-wide ban on seed spud exports and just as night follows day, the numbers of heritage and rare potatoes available (even at potato days) has plummeted.

My friend Chris Smith from Pennard Plants has run such events for decades and believes that at least 50 varieties are no longer available, including the niche, dual-purpose early roaster and boiler 'Arran Banner' and the 'popular with chefs' pink-fleshed 'Highland Burgundy'.

The effects have also spread to more common varieties too, such as the nutty tasting 'Ratte', the clay soil

© Toby Buckland

Above: **The much-loved (and still fruiting) cayenne-type chilli Toby will definitely be saving seed from**

When selecting seed for seed saving just be aware that F1 varieties can not be saved from. It will say on the label if seed is an F1

3 for £4
Seeds from A-Z

© Shutterstock

classic 'Majestic' and even the potato connoisseurs' tuber of choice ‘Epicure’.

Although still grown in the UK, these last few are raised on such a small scale that should they suffer a wet, potato blight-riddled year such as in 2024, production fails and few if any are available.

So a word to the wise, buy seed spuds early and if you’re a fan of ‘Pink Fir Apple’ or ‘Arran Pilot’, snap ‘em up quick as according to Chris, even these mainstream varieties are in short supply.

The story isn’t simply one of decline and bad news. The main players in the seed business might sell fewer varieties but their lists are honed with good ‘doers’ and as well as the latest breakthroughs in breeding, they often run a side hustle of older heritage varieties.

Choosing the right varieties for seed saving

If these traditional types are your thing, I’d recommend also seeking out the niche suppliers (see below) that sell 'open-pollinated' varieties. Unlike the highly bred ‘vars.’ that revert to their inferior forebears if seed is saved and re-grown, open-pollinated vegetables come ‘true’ to their parents. And that means you can collect the seed from your own plants and re-sow each year.

There are clues to which varieties will work, even if it isn’t explicit in the seed-listings; old varieties ‘grown since the 1800s’ for example will obviously do well, as will anything labelled as 'heritage'. That said, some veg types are easier than others. Peas, beans, lettuce, peppers, radish and tomatoes plus herbs like coriander, dill and chive are the easiest as they don’t readily hybridise and are ripe and ready to collect as seed in one summer.

Trickier are parsnips, carrots and cabbage that take up to two years to ripen, and members of the cucumber clan and beetroot family. These require absolute separation from other members of their type when they’re in flower as bees will fly far and wide to visit them bringing pollen from melons, courgettes, pumpkins and gourds, which readily fertilise the flowers to create unreliable results. The same goes for beetroot if flowering chard is nearby.

Why you can’t seed save from F1 varieties

The biggest group of veg seeds to avoid aren’t from a single edible, but highly bred strains of them labelled as F1 on the packets. These are the first generation seeds following the cross of two often very different seed strains of the same vegetable, be it a carrot, parsnip or cabbage.

They're known as the ‘First Filial’ cross (hence the F1 name) and should seeds be collected, they’ll invariably grow into inferior plants and lose the uniformity, disease resistance and yield of their expensive F1 parents.

Plants raised from open-pollinated seed can be variable too, but as long as you root out any that look dodgy and different and only save seed from your best plants, over time you create a ‘landrace’, i.e. a strain that’s uniquely honed to grow in your garden.

In mine I have a cayenne-type chilli that’s still fruiting in my greenhouse now - so definitely one to scrape out and save the seeds to grow a lot more of this summer!

Of course, saving seeds takes time but as Aristotle also said ‘Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet’. Here’s hoping they’re spicy too!.

Seed suppliers

www.pennardplants.com - an exciting range of veg, soft fruit, citrus and out-of-the-ordinary edibles.

www.vitalseeds.co.uk - open pollinated seed raised by a network of organic and nature-friendly suppliers. Great ethos and interesting and tasty range of edibles.

www.realseeds.co.uk - open-pollinated veg seed varieties and many heirloom treasures.

www.thompson-morgan.com - a go-to for modern disease-resistant hybrids with their own tried and tested heritage ‘Kew Collection’.

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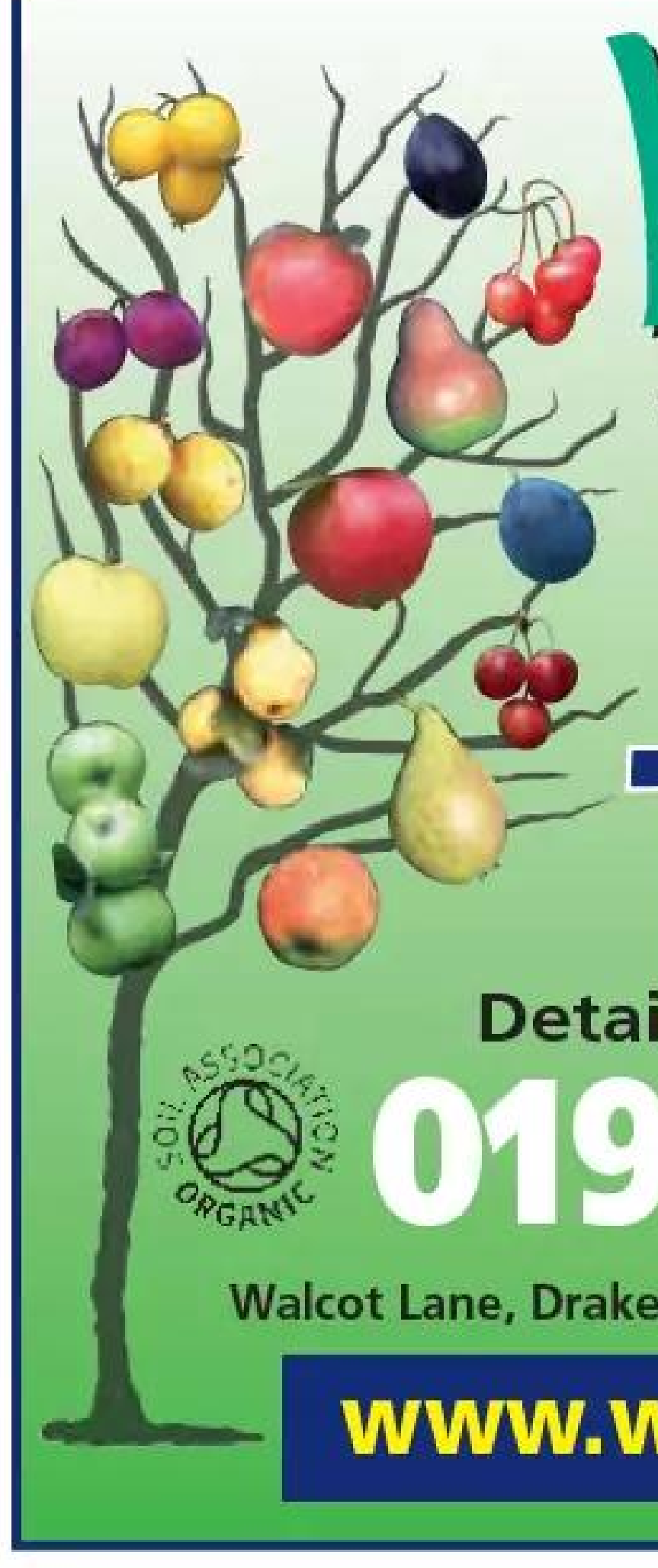
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PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Your plant recommendations from expert plantsman, Michael.

Expect a dazzling display with *Dahlia* 'Just Married'

Bare root and bulb beauty

Some exciting plants to get you growing in style this summer

Did you know that autumn and winter are often the best planting season? As long as the ground isn't wet or waterlogged, you can actually pull your gloves on, and get planting.

Bare-root plants offer amazing value, as you're basically buying just the raw material of the plant. It won't come with a fancy pot, or even any compost, you simply get the root of the plant. But, it is THE BEST way to establish new plants in your garden, as you're basically planting them whilst they're asleep, in their dormant winter season.

Come the spring, they will, of course, spring into life! And, those plants will be way ahead of anything you end up planting later in the spring or even in summer. See, it makes sense: planting bareroot plants is often one of the best kept secrets in gardening.. until now! Happy planting, I've got a few picks for you here from Dutch Grown, who sell nursery-fresh bare-root plants across the UK, and are gearing up to despatch during March.

Dahlia 'Just Married'

Did you know that dahlias are the number one bestseller among spring-planted plants? This new variety is just begging to be grown and gifted as a bunch of cut flowers to any newlyweds this summer too!

Some might plant dahlia tubers into pots before planting out later, yet you can also plant straight into the ground- choose a sunny spot with well-drained, fertile soil, and plant after the last frost in spring, when the ground has warmed.

Echinacea purpurea 'Green Twister'

A unique coneflower, with a super cool designer look to its blooms. A fantastic combination of lime-green and lilac petals, encasing its fiery red centre.

An excellent plant for borders, where it will attract the most beautiful butterflies. You might also want to snip a few blooms for indoors too, they last two weeks in a vase.

Eucomis bicolor (pineapple lily)

A rather unusual perennial, with wavy, strap-shaped leaves and purple-spotted stems. And if that wasn't enough, it also gives racemes of star-shaped pale green flowers and its blooms have a spicy scent.

It might look exotic, but it's actually super easy to grow, and with some winter protection, can be saved year after year.

Eryngium 'Jos Eijking'

A tall and captivating sea holly variety, with larger flowers than other eryngium. Those intense, iridescent, metallic blue flowers are tightly packed into egg-shaped heads, illuminating the garden throughout the summer, and pleasing pollinators.

A versatile plant for dry borders and exposed areas too, so why not give it a go!

Thalictrum delavayi (Chinese Meadow Rue)

I love thalictrum, and it's a great 'stitching plant', dot it through your borders to bring everything together as it fills in gaps here and there. Lovely, blue-green foliage and frothy flowers come midsummer.

Useful for damp corners, especially in dappled shade. Pair it with ferns and hostas for something special.

www.mrplantgeek.substack.com

Blue-green foliage and fantastic frothy flowers of *Thalictrum delavayi* (Chinese Meadow Rue)

All images © Michael Perry

GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing AG contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

Four ways to get crops off to the best start

Bob reveals his germination gems and tips for seedling success

How to get your vegetable planting off to the best possible start
Inset: Bob recommends multi-celled seed modules for easier planting on

We might have already sown ultra-early batches of crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers or leeks, more if we've warmth and space, many more if we've also got artificial light.

Still, we will make the vast majority of indoor sowings in a greenhouse, tunnel or cold frame over the next month or so. It's only after that we can start sowing hardier crops and flowers in situ, directly in the ground where they're to mature. Noticeably, most plants sown where they grow do better than those transplanted into place, but only if they come up and survive.

A huge advantage with transplants is eliminating any possible waste of time and opportunity awaiting germination, only to find nothing emerges. We can also plant out just enough, at the exact spacing, and if deemed necessary give temporary protection until they're established. But there's no thinning of competing seedlings and weeding both before and after planting, so the task is simpler.

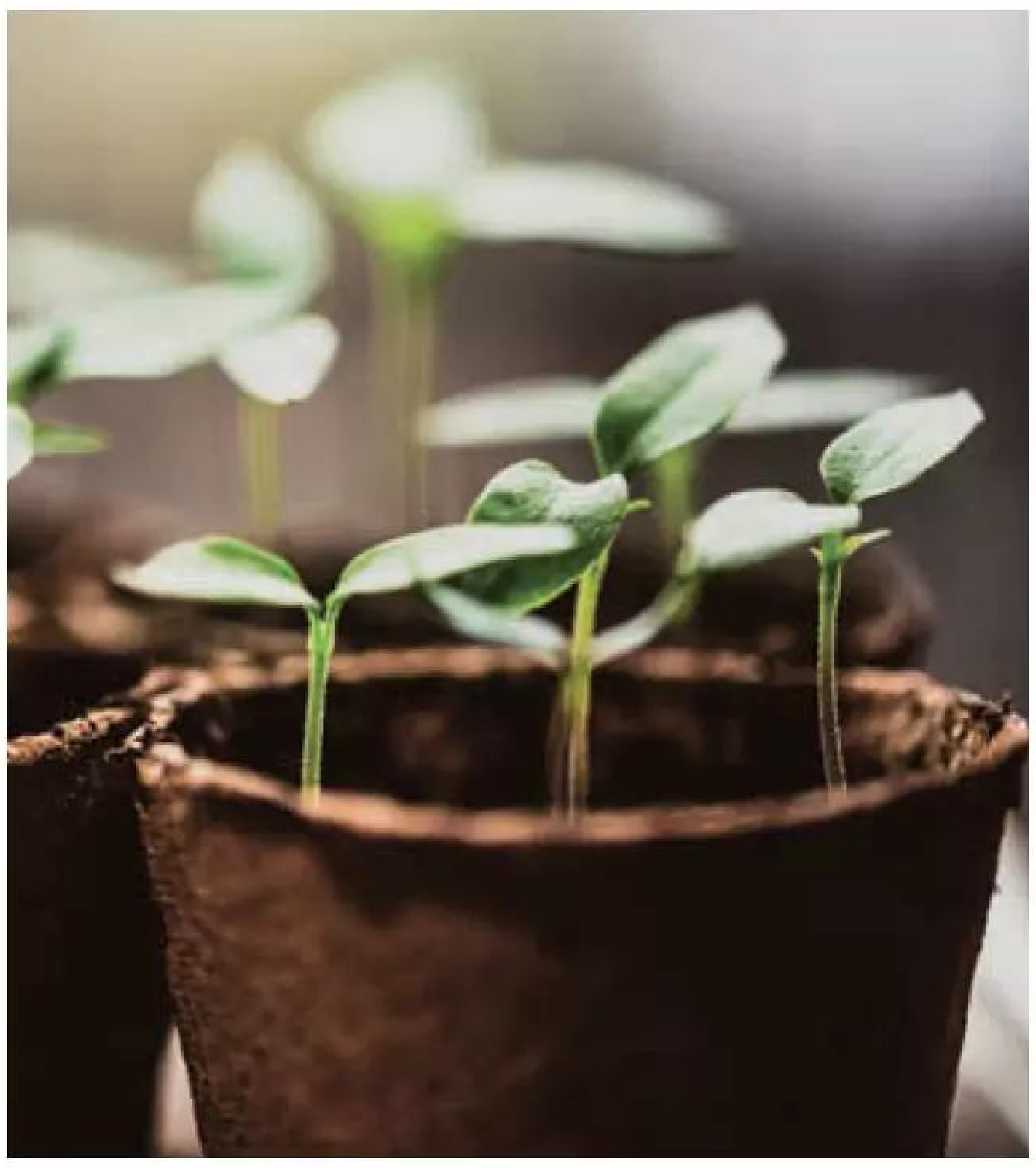
Plus the weather's becoming more erratic, it's riskier following the 'old' calendar of sowing times, so it makes even more sense to start more crops under cover and then grow them on in safety until the soil's definitely warm and moist enough for them.

Sow seed in smaller multi-celled trays

Traditionally, most seeds were thickly sown in a pot or wooden seed tray and then the seedlings were 'pricked out' into individual pots. This worked well for large numbers, but only when the seedlings were pricked out within a few days of emergence. Any crowding, even if only for a few days, gave much poorer results.

Fortunately it's now easier to start off each plant in its own tiny container with multi-celled trays in many handy sizes and materials. These mean that each seedling can grow into its own compost without interference from others, and sustains far less damage when moved on.

Naturally it pays to sow two or even three seeds to each cell to be sure of a healthy germination, but seedlings really must be reduced to leave only the best as soon as they can be compared.



Above: Be careful to make sure seedlings don't outgrow their initial quarters

Invest in the best seed compost

Please do not economise on the compost you sow into, only ever consider using dedicated 'sowing/seed compost', the best peat-free you can afford. This is really worth investing in, after all you don't use much, and failed sowings are really not wanted.

Compare and sieve composts

I reckon it's actually worth buying two or three brands and comparing them side-by-side until you work out which is best. Do consider sieving each just before use, not to remove bits but to re-introduce the air to the packed down material, which your seeds will need to germinate.

Move seedlings on as they grow

Then, once they're up, don't leave your superbly raised little plants too long in their cells as that may stunt them. Move them on to small pots (and again later to larger) as soon as their roots can be seen penetrating throughout their compost.

They'll now need a stronger, richer, 'potting/general/multi-purpose compost'. Fortunately, as seedlings are more robust than seeds, this is slightly less crucial, but even so it really is worth comparing a few brands rather than putting all your eggs in one basket.

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com** and what's happening in his garden via Twitter (now X) **@FlowerdewBob**

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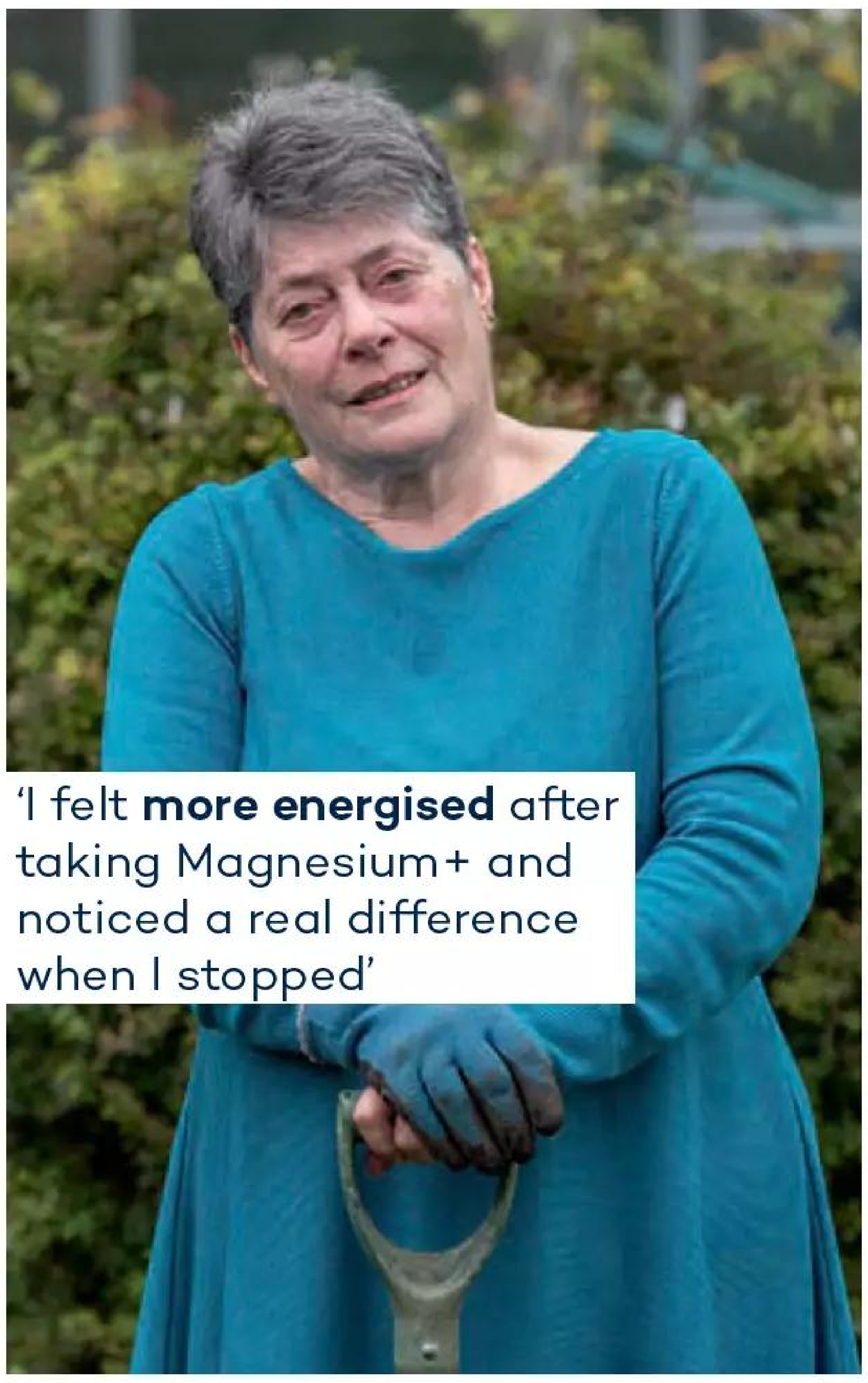

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'I just feel more able to cope with the day.'

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